

1. **N**OW after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took Gath and her towns out of the hands of the Philistines. 2. And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts. 3. ¶ And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates. 4. And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot-horses, but reserved of them an hundred chariots. 5. And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadarezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. 6. Then David put garrisons in Syria-Damascus, and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went. 7. And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadarezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. 8. Likewise from Tibhath, and from Chun, cities of Hadarezer, brought David very much brass, wherewith Solomon made the brazen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass.

After this, it is said, ver. 1. David did those great exploits. After the sweet communion he had had with God by the word and prayer in the foregoing chapter, he went on in his work with an extraordinary vigour and courage, conquering and to conquer. Thus Jacob after his vision lift up his feet, Gen. xxix. 1.

We have taken a view of these victories before, and shall now only observe

1. Those that have been long enemies to the Israel of God, will be brought down at last. The Philistines had for several generations been vexatious to Israel, but now David subdued them, ver. 1. Thus shall all opposing rule, principality and power, be at the end of time put down by the Son of David, and the most inveterate enemies shall fall before him.

2. Such is the uncertainty of this world, that many times men lose their wealth and power, then when they think to confirm it. Hadarezer was smitten as he went to establish his dominion, ver. 3.

3. A horse is a vain thing for safety, so David said, Psal. xxxiii. 17. and it seems he believed what he said, for he houghed the chariot horses, ver. 4. being resolved not to trust to them, (Psal. xx. 7.) he would not use them.

4. The enemies of God's church are often made to ruin themselves by helping one another, ver. 5. The Syrians of Damascus were smitten when they came to help Hadarezer. When hand thus joins in hand, they shall not only not go unpunished, but thereby they shall be gathered as sheaves into the floor, Micah iv. 11, 12.

5. The wealth of the sinner sometimes proves to have been laid up for the just. The Syrians brought gifts, ver. 6. Their shields of gold, and their brass was brought to Jerusalem, ver. 7, 8. As the tabernacle was built of the spoils of the Egyptians, so the temple of the spoils of other Gentile nations; a happy preface of the interest the Gentiles should have in the gospel church.

9. ¶ Now when Tou king of Hamath heard how David had smitten all the host of Hadarezer king of Zobah: 10. He sent Hadoram his son to king David, to enquire of his welfare, and to congratulate him, because he had fought against Hadarezer, and smitten him (for Hadarezer had warred with Tou), and with him all manner of vessels of gold, and silver, and brass. 11. ¶ Them also king David dedicated unto the LORD, with the silver and the gold that he brought from all these nations; from Edom, and from Moab, and from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines, and from Amalek. 12. Moreover, Abishai the son of Zeruiah slew of the Edomites in the valley of salt, eighteen thousand. 13. ¶ And he put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became David's servants. Thus the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went. 14. ¶ So David reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice among all his people. 15. And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host, Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud recorder. 16. And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Abimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests, and Shavsha was scribe. 17. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites, and the Pelethites: and the sons of David were chief about the king.

Here let us learn,

1. That it is our interest to make those our friends who have the presence of God with them. The king of Hamath hearing of David's great successes, sent to congratulate him, and to court his favour with a noble present, ver. 9, 10. It is in vain to contend with the Son of David: *Kiss the Son therefore, lest he be angry*: Let the kings and judges of the earth, and all inferior people too, be thus wise, thus instructed. The presents we are to bring him are not vessels of gold and silver, as here; those shall be welcome to him, who have no such presents to bring; but our hearts and sincere affections, our own selves, our whole selves, we must present to him as living sacrifices.

2. That what God blesteth us with, we must honour him with. The presents of his friends, as well as the spoils of his enemies, David dedicated unto the Lord, ver. 11. i. e. he laid them up towards the building and enriching of the temple. That is most truly and most comfortably our own, which we have consecrated unto the Lord, and which we use for his glory. Let our merchandise and our hire be holiness to the Lord, Isa. xxiii. 18.

3. That those who take God along with them wherever they go, may expect to prosper and be preserved wherever they go. It was said before, ver. 6. and here again, ver. 13. that the Lord preserved David whithersoever

he went. Those are always under the eye of God, that have God always in their eye.

4. God gives men power, not that they may look great with it, but that they may do good with it. When David reigned over all Israel, he executed judgment and justice among all his people, and so answered the end of his elevation. He was not so intent on his conquests abroad, as to neglect the administration of justice at home. Herein he served the purposes of the kingdom of providence, and of that God who sits on the throne judging right; and was an eminent type of the Messiah, the sceptre of whose kingdom is a right sceptre.

C H A P. XIX.

The story is here repeated of David's war with the Ammonites, and the Syrians their allies, and the victories he obtained over them, which we read just as it is here related, 2 Sam. x. Here is, (1.) David's civility to the king of Ammon, in sending an embassy of condolence to him on occasion of his father's death, ver. 1, 2. (2.) His great incivility to David, in the base usage he gave to his ambassadors, ver. 3, 4. (3.) David's just resentment of it, and the war which broke out thereupon, in which the Ammonites did politically in bringing the Syrians to their assistance, ver. 6, 7. Joab did bravely, ver. 8—13. and Israel was once again victorious, ver. 14—19.

1. **N**OW it came to pass after this, that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead. 2. And David said, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father shewed kindness to me. And David sent messengers, to comfort him concerning his father: so the servants of David came into the land of the children of Ammon, to Hanun, to comfort him. 3. But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? are not his servants come unto thee, for to search, and to overthrow, and to spy out the land? 4. Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved them, and cut off their garments in the midst hard by their buttocks, and sent them away. 5. Then there went certain, and told David how the men were served; and he sent to meet them (for the men were greatly ashamed) and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return.

Let us here observe,

1. That it becomes good people to be neighbourly, and especially to be grateful. David will pay respect to Hanun, because he is his neighbour; and religion teaches us to be civil and obliging to all, to honour all men; and to be ready to do all offices of kindness to those we live among; and difference in religion must be no obstruction to it. But besides this, David remembers the kindness which his father shewed to him. They that have received kindness, must return it as they have ability and opportunity; they that have received it from the parents, must return it to the children, when they are gone.

2. That, as saith the proverb of the ancients, *Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked*, 1 Sam. xxiv. 13. The vile person will speak villainy, and the instruments of the church will be evil, to destroy those with lying words that speak right, Isa. xxxii. 6, 7. They that are ill, and design ill themselves, are apt to be jealous, and to suspect ill of others without cause. Hanun's servants suggested that David's ambassadors came as spies; as if so great and mighty a man as David needed to do so mean a thing. If he had any design upon the Ammonites, he could effect it by open force, and had no occasion for any fraudulent practices; or, as if a man of such virtue and honour would do so ill a thing. Yet Hanun hearkened to the suggestion, and against the law of nations treated David's ambassadors villainously.

3. Masters ought to protect their servants, and with the greatest tenderness to concern themselves for them, if they come by any loss or damage in their service; David did so for his ambassadors, ver. 5. Christ will do so for his ministers; and let all masters thus give unto their servants that which is just and equal.

6. ¶ And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. 7. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots, and the king of Maachah and his people, who came and pitched before Medeba. And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle. 8. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men. 9. And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array before the gate of the city: and the kings that were come were by themselves in the field. 10. Now when Joab saw that the battle was set against him, before and behind, he chose out of all the choice of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians. 11. And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, and they set themselves in array against the children of Ammon. 12. And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will help thee. 13. Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in his sight. 14. So

14. So Joab and the people that *were* with him, drew nigh before the Syrians, unto the battle; and they fled before him. 15. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, they likewise fled before Abishai his brother, and entered into the city. Then Joab came to Jerusalem. 16. ¶ And when the Syrians saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they sent messengers, and drew forth the Syrians that *were* beyond the river: and Shophach the captain of the host of Hadarezer *went* before them. 17. And it was told David, and he gathered all Israel, and passed over Jordan, and came upon them, and set the battle in array against them: so when David had put the battle in array against the Syrians, they fought with him. 18. But the Syrians fled before Israel, and David slew of the Syrians seven thousand men, *which fought in chariots*, and forty thousand footmen, and killed Shophach the captain of the host. 19. And when the servants of Hadarezer saw that they were put to the worse before Israel, they made peace with David, and became his servants: neither would the Syrians help the children of Ammon any more.

We may see here,

1. How the hearts of sinners that are marked for ruin, are oftentimes hardened to their destruction. The children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, ver. 6. and then it had been their wisdom to have desired conditions of peace, to have humbled themselves, and offered any satisfaction for the injury they had done him; the rather, because they had made themselves not only odious to David, but obnoxious to the justice of God, who is *King of nations*, and will assert the injured rights, and maintain the violated laws of nations. But instead of this they prepared for war, and so brought upon themselves, by David's hands, those desolations which he never intended them.

2. How the courage of brave men is heightened and invigorated by difficulties. When Joab saw that the battle was set against him before and behind, ver. 10. instead of meditating a retreat; he doubled his resolution; and though he could not double, he divided his army, and not only spoke, but acted like a gallant man that had a great presence of mind when he saw himself surrounded. He engaged with his brother for a mutual assistance, ver. 12. excited himself and the rest of the officers to act vigorously in their respective posts, with an eye to God's glory, and their country's good, not to any honour and advantage of their own, and then left the issue with God, *Let the Lord do that which is right in his sight*.

3. How vain the greatest art and strength is against justice and equity! The Ammonites played their cards as well as men could possibly do, brought as good a force into the field, and disposed it with as much policy; yet having a bad cause, and acting in defence of wrong, it would not do; they were put to the worst. Right will prevail and triumph at last.

4. To how little purpose it is for those to rally again, and reinforce themselves, that have not God on their side! The Syrians, though no way concerned in the merits of the cause, but serving only as mercenaries to the Ammonites, when they were beaten, thought themselves concerned to retrieve their honour, and therefore called in the assistance of the Syrians on the other side Euphrates, but to no purpose; still they fled before Israel, ver. 18. They lost seven thousand men, who are said to be the men of seven hundred chariots, 2 Sam. x. 18. For as now in a man of war for sea-service, they allot ten men to a gun; so then, in land-service, ten men to a chariot.

5. Those that have meddled with strife that belongs not to them, and have found that they meddled to their own hurt, do well to learn wit at length, and meddle no farther. The Syrians finding that Israel was the conquering side, not only broke off their alliance with the Ammonites, and would help them no more, ver. 19. but made peace with David, and became his servants. Let those that have in vain stood it out against God, be thus wise for themselves, and agree with him quickly, while they are in the way; let them become his servants, for they cannot but see themselves undone if they be his enemies.

C H A P. XX.

Here is a repetition of the story of David's wars, (1.) With the Ammonites, and the taking of Rabbah, ver. 1—3. (2.) With the giants of the Philistines, ver. 4—8.

1. **A**ND it came to pass, that after the year was expired, at the time that kings go out to battle, Joab led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah (but David tarried at Jerusalem) and Joab smote Rabbah, and destroyed it. 2. And David took the crown of their king from off his head, and found it to weigh a talent of gold, and there were precious stones in it, and it was set upon David's head, and he brought also exceeding much spoil out of the city. 3. And he brought out the people that were in it: and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron: and with axes: even so dealt David, with all the cities of the children of Ammon. And David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

How the army of the Ammonites and their allies was routed in the field, we read in the foregoing chapter: here we have the destruction of Rabbah, the metropolis of their kingdom, ver. 1. the putting of their king's crown upon David's head, ver. 2. and the great severity that was used towards the people, ver. 3. This we had a more full account of, 2 Sam. xi. and xii. and cannot but remember by this sad token, that while Joab was besieging Rabbah, David fell into that great sin in the matter of Uriah.

But it is observable, that though the rest of the story be repeated, that is not; but only a hint given of it in those words which lie here in a paren-

thesis (but David tarried at Jerusalem.) If he had been abroad with his army, he had been out of the way of that temptation; but indulging his ease, he fell into uncleanness. Now as the relating of that sin David fell into, is an instance of the impartiality and fidelity of the sacred writers; so the avoiding of the repetition of it here, when there was a fair occasion given to speak of it again, is designed to teach us, That though there may be a just occasion to speak of the faults and miscarriages of others, yet we should not take delight in the repetition of them; that should always be looked upon as an unpleasing subject, which though sometimes one cannot help falling upon, yet one would not choose to dwell upon, nor love to rake in a dunghill. Those persons or actions we can say no good of, we had best say nothing of.

4. ¶ And it came to pass after this, that there arose war at Gezer with the Philistines, at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Sippai that was of the children of the giant; and they were subdued. 5. And there was war again with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jair, slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear-staff was like a weaver's beam. 6. And yet again there was a war at Gath, where was a man of great stature, whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot: and he also was the son of the giant. 7. But when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, slew him. 8. These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

The Philistines were pretty well subdued, chap. xviii. 1. but as it was in the destruction of the Canaanites by Joshua, the sons of Anak were last subdued, Josh. xi. 21. so here in the conquest of the Philistines, the giants of Gath were last brought down: In the conflicts between grace and corruption there are some sins, like these giants, keep their ground a great while, and are not mastered without much difficulty, and long struggle: but judgment will be brought forth unto victory at last.

Observe, 1. We never read of giants among the Israelites, as we do of giants among the Philistines: giants of Gath, but not giants of Jerusalem: the growth of God's plants is in usefulness, not in bulk. They that covet to have cubits added to their stature, do not consider that it will but make them more unwieldy. In the balance of the sanctuary, David far outweighs Goliath.

2. The servants of David, though men of ordinary stature, were quite too hard for the giants of Gath in every encounter; because they had God on their side, who takes pleasure in abasing the lofty looks, and mortifying the giants that are in the earth; as he did of old by the deluge, though they were men of renown. Never let the church's friends be disheartened by the power and pride of the church's enemies; we need not fear great men against us, while we have the great God for us. What will a finger more on each hand do, or a toe more on each foot, in contest with Omnipotence?

3. These giants defied Israel, ver. 7. and were thus made to pay for their insolence. None are more visibly marked for ruin than those that reproach God and his Israel. God will do great things, rather than suffer the enemy to behave themselves proudly, Deut. xxxii. 27. As David's victories, so those of the Son of David, are gradual: We see not yet all things put under him; but it will be seen shortly: and death itself, the last enemy, like these giants, triumphed over.

C H A P. XXI.

As this rehearsal makes no mention of David's sin in the matter of Uriah, so neither of the troubles of his family that followed upon it; not a word of Absalom's rebellion, or Sheba's; but David's sin in numbering the people is here related, because in the atonement made for that sin, an intimation was given of the spot of ground on which the temple should be built. Here is, (1.) David's sin in forcing Joab to number the people, ver. 1—4. (2.) David's sorrow for what he had done, as soon as he perceived the sinfulness of it, ver. 5—8. (3.) The sad dilemma (or trilemma rather) he was brought to, when it was put to him to choose how he would be punished for this sin, and what rod he would be beaten with, ver. 9—13. (4.) The woful havoc which was made by the pestilence in the country, and the narrow escape which Jerusalem had of being laid waste by it, ver. 14—16. (5.) David's repentance, and sacrifice upon this occasion, and the staying of the plague thereupon, ver. 18—30. This awful story we have already met with, and meditated upon, 2 Sam. xxiv.

1. **A**ND Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. 2. And David said to Joab, and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it. 3. And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? 4. Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab: wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. 5. ¶ And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. 6. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.

Numbering

Numbering the people one would think, was no ill thing: why should not the shepherd know the count of his flock; but God sees not as man sees: It is plain it was ill done of David to do it, and a great provocation to God; because he did it in the pride of his heart; and there is no sin that has in it more of contradiction; and therefore more of offence to God, than pride. The sin was David's; he alone must bear the blame of it: But here we are told,

1. How active the tempter was in it, *ver. 1. Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to do it.* It is said, *2. Sam. xxiv. 1. that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David to do it.* The righteous judgments of God are to be observed and acknowledged even in the sins and unrighteousness of men. We are sure God is not the author of sin, he *tempts no man*; and therefore when it is said he moved David to do it, it must be explained by this here, that for wise and holy ends he permitted the devil to do it. Here we trace this foul stream to its fountain, (1.) That Satan, the enemy of God and all good, should *stand up against Israel*, is not strange: it is what he aims at, to weaken the strength, diminish the numbers, and eclipse the glory of God's Israel, to whom he is Satan, a sworn *adversary*. But (2.) That he should influence David, the man after God's own heart, to do an ill thing, may well be wondered at; one would think him one of those whom the wicked one toucheth not: no, even the best faints, till they come to heaven, must never think themselves out of the reach of Satan's temptations.

Now when Satan meant to do Israel a mischief, what course did he take? He did not *move God against them to destroy them*, as he did against Joab, *chap. ii. 3.* but he provoked David, the best friend they had, to number them, and so to offend God, and set him against them. Note, 1. The Devil doth us more mischief by tempting us to sin against our God, than he doth by *accusing us before our God*. He destroys none but by their own hands. 2. The greatest spite he can do to the church of God, is to tempt the rulers of the church to pride; for none can conceive the fatal consequence of that sin in all, especially in church rulers; *ye shall not be so*, Luke xxii. 29.

2. How passive the instrument was. Joab was the person employed, an active man in public business; but to this he was perfectly forced, and did it with the greatest reluctance imaginable.

(1.) He put in a remonstrance against it before he began it. No man more forward than he in any thing that really tended to the honour of the king or the welfare of the kingdom, but in this matter he would gladly be excused; for, (1.) It was a needless thing, there was no occasion at all for it. God had promised to multiply them, and he needed not question the accomplishment of that promise; they were all his servants, and he needed not doubt of their loyalty and affection to him. Their number was as much in strength as they could desire, (2.) It was a dangerous thing; the doing it might be a cause of trespass to Israel, and might provoke God against them. This Joab apprehended, and yet David himself did not. The most learned in the laws of God, are not always the most quick-sighted in the application of those laws.

(2.) He was quite weary of it before he had done it; for *the king's word was abominable to Joab*, *ver. 6.* Time was, when whatever king David did *pleased all the people*, *2 Sam. iii. 36.* but now there was a general disgust at these orders, which confirmed Joab in his dislike of them; so that though the produce of this muster was really very great, yet he had no heart to perfect it, but left two tribes unnumbered, *ver. 5, 6.* two considerable ones, Levi and Benjamin; and perhaps was not very exact in numbering the rest, because he did not do it with any pleasure, which might be one occasion of this difference between the sums here and *2 Sam. xxiv. 9.*

7. ¶ And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. 8. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. 9. ¶ And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, 10. Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things, choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. 11. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee, 12. Either three years famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes (while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee) or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel: Now therefore advise thyself, what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. 13. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD (for very great are his mercies) but let me not fall into the hands of man. 14. ¶ So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. 15. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16. And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem: then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth fell upon their faces. 17. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed: but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house, but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.

David is here under the rod for numbering the people, that rod of correction, which drives out the foolishness of pride. Let us briefly observe,

1. How he was corrected: If God's dearest children do amiss, they must expect to smart for it.

(1.) He is given to understand that God is displeased, and that is no small uneasiness to so good a man as David, *ver. 7.* God takes notice of, and is displeased with the sins of his people, and no sin more displeasing to him than pride of heart; nor is any thing more humbling, and grieving, and mortifying to a gracious soul, than to see itself under God's displeasure.

(2.) He is put to his choice, whether he will be punished by war, famine, or pestilence; for punished he must be, and by one of these. Thus for his farther humiliation he is put into a strait, a great strait; and has the terror of all the three judgments impressed upon his mind, no doubt, to his great amazement, while he is considering which he shall choose.

(3.) He hears of seventy thousand of his subjects, who in a few hours were struck dead by the pestilence, *ver. 14.* He was proud of the multitude of his people, but divine justice took a course to make them fewer. Justly is that taken from us, weakened or embittered to us, which we are proud of. David must have the people numbered: Bring me the number of them saith he, that I may know it: But now God numbers them after another manner, *numbers them to the sword*, Isa. lxi. 12. And David had another number of them brought him, more to his confusion than that was to his satisfaction, *viz.* The number of the slain: a black bill of mortality, which is a draw-back to his muster roll.

(4.) He sees the destroying angel, with his sword drawn against Jerusalem, *ver. 16.* This could not but be very terrible to him, as it was a visible indication of the anger of heaven, and threatened the utter destruction of that beloved city. Pestilences make the greatest devastations in the most populous places. The sight of an angel, though coming peaceably and on a friendly errand, has made even mighty men to tremble; how dreadful then must this sight be of an angel with a drawn sword in his hand, a flaming sword, like that of the cherubim, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. While we lie under the wrath of God, the holy angels are armed against us, though we see them not, as David did.

2. How he bore the correction.

(1.) He made a very penitent confession of his sin, and prayed earnestly for the pardon of it, *ver. 8.* Now he owns he had sinned, had sinned greatly, had done foolishly, very foolishly, begs however he might be corrected for it, and the iniquity of it might be done away.

(2.) He accepted the punishment of his iniquity, let thy hand be on me and on my father's house, I submit to the rod, only let me be the sufferer, for I am the sinner, mine is the guilty head at which the sword should be pointed.

(3.) He cast himself upon the mercy of God, though he knew he was angry with him, and did not entertain any ill thoughts of him; however it be, *Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great*, *ver. 13.* Good men, even when God frowns upon them, think well of him; *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*

(4.) He expressed a very tender concern for the people, and it went to his heart to see them plagued for his transgression; *these sheep, what have they done?*

18. ¶ Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD, in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 19. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. 20. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel: and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat. 21. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshing-floor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. 22. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshing-floor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price, that the plague may be stayed from the people. 23. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt-offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat-offering, I give it all. 24. And king David said to Ornan, Nay, but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt-offerings without cost. 25. So David gave to Ornan for the place, six hundred shekels of gold by weight. 26. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, and called upon the LORD, and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering. 27. And the LORD commanded the angel, and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof. 28. ¶ At that time, when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. 29. For the tabernacle of the LORD which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that season in the high-place at Gibeon. 30. But David could not go before it to enquire of God; for he was afraid, because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

We have here the controversy taken up, and upon David's repentance, his peace made with God. *Though thou wast angry with me thine anger is turned away.*

1. A stop was put to the progress of the execution, *ver. 15.* When David repented him of the sin, God repented him of the judgment, and ordered the destroying angel to *lay his hand and sheath his sword*, *ver. 27.*

2. Direction was given to David to rear an altar in the threshing-floor of Ornan, *ver. 18.* The angel commanded the prophet Gad to bring David this direction; the same angel that had in God's name carried on the war, is here forward to set on foot the treaty of peace; for angels do not desire the woful day. The angel could have given this order to David himself, but he chose to do it by his seer, that he might put an honour upon the prophetic

prophetical office. Thus the revelation of Jesus Christ was notified by the angel to John, and by him to the churches. The commanding of David to build an altar was a blessed token of reconciliation; for if God had been pleased to kill him, he would not have appointed, because he would not have accepted, a sacrifice at his hands.

David presently made a bargain with Ornan for the threshing-floor; for he would not serve God at other people's charge. Ornan generously offered it him gratis, not only in complaisance to the king, but because he had himself *seen the angel*, ver. 20. which put him into such a fright, that he and his four sons hid themselves, as unable to bear the brightness of his glory, and of his drawn sword. Under these apprehensions he was willing to do any thing towards making the atonement. Those that are duly sensible of the terrors of the Lord will do all they can in their places to promote religion, and all the methods of reconciliation for the turning away of God's wrath.

4. God testified his acceptance to David's offerings on this altar; He answered him from Heaven by fire, ver. 26. To signify that God's anger was turned away from him; the fire that might justly have fastened upon the sinner fastened upon the sacrifice, and consumed that; and upon this, the destroying sword was returned into its sheath. Thus Christ was made sin, and a curse for us, and it pleased the Lord to bruise him, that through him God might be to us, not a consuming fire, but a reconciled Father.

5. He continued to offer his sacrifice upon this altar. The brazen altar which Moses made was at Gibeon, ver. 29. and there all the sacrifices of Israel were offered. But David was so frightened with the sight of the sword of the angel, that he could not go thither, ver. 30. The business required haste, when the plague was begun. Aaron must go quickly, nay, he must run to make atonement, Numb. xvi. 46, 47. And the case here was no less urgent; so that David had no time to go to Gibeon; nor durst he leave the angel, with his sword drawn over Jerusalem, lest the fatal stroke should be given before he came back. And therefore God in tenderness to him bid him build an altar in that place, dispensing with his own law concerning one altar, because of the present distress, and accepting the sacrifices offered on this new altar, which was not set up in an opposition to that, but in concurrence with it. The symbols of unity were not so much insisted on as unity itself. Nay, when the present distress was over, (as it should seem) David as long as he lived sacrificed there, though the altar at Gibeon was still kept up. For God had owned the sacrifices that were here offered, and had testified his acceptance of them, ver. 28. On those administrations where we have experienced the tokens of God's presence, and have found that he was with us of a truth, it is good to continue our attendance. Here God has graciously met me, and therefore I will still expect to meet with him.

C H A P. XXII.

Out of the eater comes forth meat. *It was upon occasion of that terrible judgment, inflicted on Israel for the sin of David, that God gave intimation for the setting up of another altar, and of the place where he would have the temple to be built, upon which David was excited with great vigour to make preparation for that great work; wherein, though he had long since designed it, it should seem he was of late grown remiss, till awakened by the alarm of that judgment. The tokens of God's favour he received, after those of his displeasure, (1.) Directed him to the place, ver. 1. (2.) Encouraged and quickened him to the work. 3. He set himself to prepare for the building, ver. 2—5. 2. He instructed Solomon, and gave him a charge concerning this work, ver. 6—16. 3. He commanded the princes to assist him in it, ver. 17—19. There is a great deal of difference between the frame of David's spirit in the beginning of the former chapter, and in the beginning of this. There, in the pride of his heart, he was numbering the people; here, in his humility preparing for the service of God. There corruption was uppermost, but the well of living water in the soul, though it may be muddied, will work itself clear again: grace here has recovered the upper hand.*

1. **T**HEN David said, This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel. 2. And David commanded to gather together the strangers that were in the land of Israel, and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God. 3. And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; 4. Also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar-wood to David. 5. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the LORD, must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.

Here is, 1. The place fixed for the building of the temple, ver. 1. *Then David said*, by inspiration of God, and as a declaration of his mind, *This is the house of the Lord God.* If a temple must be built for God, it is fit it be left to him to choose the ground, for all the earth is his; and this is the ground he makes choice of; ground that had pertained to a Jebusite, and, perhaps, there was not a spot of ground besides, in or about Jerusalem, that did so; a happy preface of the setting up of the gospel temple among the Gentiles. See Acts xv. 16, 17. The ground was a threshing-floor; for the church of the living God is his floor, his threshing, and the corn of his floor, Isa. xxi. 10. Christ's fan is in his hand thoroughly to purge his floor. This is to be the house, because this is the altar; the temple was built for the sake of the altar: There were altars long before there were temples.

2. Preparation made for that building. David must not build it, but he would do all he could towards it; he prepared abundantly before his death, ver. 5. It intimates that the consideration of his age and growing infirmities, which shewed his death approaching, quickened him towards his latter end, to be very diligent in making this preparation. What our hand finds to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do it with all our might, before our death, because after death there is no device nor working.

No. LXI.*

Now we are told,

1. What induced him to make such preparation. Two things he considered, (1.) That Solomon was young and tender, and not likely to apply himself with any great vigour to this business at first, so that unless he found the wheels set a going, he would be in danger of losing a great deal of time at first, the rather, because being young, he would be tempted to put it off; whereas if he found the materials got ready to his hand, the most difficult part of the work would be over, and it would excite and encourage him to go about it in the beginning of his reign. Note, Those that are aged and experienced should consider those that are young and tender, provide them what help they can, that they may make the work of God as easy to them as possible. (2.) That the house must be exceeding magnificent, very stately and sumptuous, strong and beautiful, every thing about it the best in its kind: And good reason, because it was intended for the honour of the great God, the Lord of the whole earth, and was to be a type of Christ, in whom all fulness dwells, and in whom are hid all treasures. Men were then to be taught by sensible methods, and the grandeur of the house would help to affect the worshippers with a holy awe and reverence for God, and would invite strangers to come and see it, as the wonder of the world, who thereby would be brought acquainted with the true God, therefore it is here designed to be of fame and of glory throughout all countries. David foretold this good effect of its being magnificent, Psal. xvii. 29. *Because of the temple at Jerusalem, shall kings bring presents unto thee.*

2. What preparation he made; In general he prepared abundantly, as we shall find afterwards; cedar and stones, iron and brass are here intimated in, ver. 2, 3, 4. Cedar he had from the Tyrians and Zidonians; *The daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift*, Psal. xlv. 12. He also got workmen together, the strangers that were in the land of Israel; some think, because they were generally better artists, and more ingenious in manual operations than the Israelites; or rather, because he would not employ the free-born Israelites in any thing that looked mean and servile. They were delivered from the bondage of making bricks in Egypt, and must not return to hew stones. These strangers were profelytes to the Jewish religion, who, though not enslaved, yet were not of equal dignity with Israelites.

6. ¶ Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the LORD God of Israel. 7. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: 8. But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. 9. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. 10. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever. 11. Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee. 12. Only the LORD give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, that thou mayest keep the law of the LORD thy God. 13. Then shalt thou prosper, if thou takest heed to fulfil the statutes and judgments which the LORD charged Moses with concerning Israel: be strong and of good courage, dread not, nor be dismayed. 14. Now behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the LORD an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass, and iron, without weight (for it is in abundance) timber also and stone have I prepared, and thou mayest add thereto. 15. Moreover, there are workmen with thee in abundance, hewers and workers of stone and timber, and all manner of cunning men for every manner of work. 16. Of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron there is no number. Arise therefore, and be doing, and the LORD be with thee.

Though Solomon was young and tender, he was capable of receiving instructions concerning the work for which he was designed, which his father here gives him. When David came to the throne, he had many things to do, for the foundations were all out of course; but Solomon had only one thing in charge, and that was to build a house for the Lord God of Israel, ver. 6. Now,

1. He tells him why he did not do it himself. It was in his mind to do it, ver. 7. but God forbid him, because he had shed much blood, ver. 8. Some think it refers to the blood of Uriah, which fastened such a reproach upon him as rendered him unworthy the honour of building the temple; but that honour was forbidden him before he had shed that blood, therefore it must be meant, as it is here explained, of the blood he shed in his wars, for he had been a man of war from his youth, which, though shed very justly and honourably, and in the service of God and Israel, yet made him unfit to be employed in this service, or rather less fit than another that had never been called to such bloody work. God, by assigning this as the reason of laying David aside from this work, shewed how precious human life is to him, and intended a type of him who should build the gospel temple, not by destroying men's lives, but saving them, Luke ix. 56.

2. He gives him the reason why he imposed this task upon him. (1.) Because God had designed him for it, nominated him as the man that must do it; *A son shall be born to thee that shall be called Solomon, and he shall build a house for my name*, ver. 9, 10. Nothing is more powerful to engage us to, and encourage us in any service for God, than to know that hereunto we are appointed. (2.) Because he would have leisure and opportunity to do it. He should be a man of rest, and therefore should not have his time or thoughts, or wealth, diverted from this business. He should have rest from his enemies abroad, none of them should invade or threaten him, or give him provocation; and he should have peace and quietness at home,

and therefore let him build the house. Note, Where God gives rest he expects work. (3.) Because God had promised to establish his kingdom. Let this encourage him to honour God, that God had honour in store for him; let him build up God's house, and God will build up his throne. Note, God's gracious promises should quicken and invigorate our religious service.

3. He delivers him an account of the vast preparations he had made for his building, *ver. 14.* not in a way of pride and vain-glory; no, he speaks of it as a poor thing, *I have in my poverty prepared, marg.* But as an encouragement to Solomon to engage cheerfully in this work, that he began with a good bottom. The treasure he mentioned of one hundred thousand talents of gold, and ten hundred thousand talents of silver, amounts to such an incredible deal, that most interpreters either allow an error in the copy, or that the talent here signifies no more but a plate or piece; ingots we call them. I am apt to think, a certain number is here put for an uncertain, because it is said, *ver. 16.* that of the gold and silver as well as of the brass and iron there was no number, and that David here includes all the dedicated things, *chap. xviii. 11.* which he designed for the house of the Lord, i. e. not only for the building of it, but for the treasures of it, and putting all together, it might come pretty near what is here spoken of. Hundreds and thousands are numbers we often use to express that which is very much, when we would not be understood strictly.

4. He chargeth him to keep God's commandments, and to take heed to his duty in every thing, *ver. 13.* He must not think by building the temple to purchase a dispensation to sin; no, but on the contrary, his doing that would not be accepted, nor accounted of, if he did not take heed to fulfil the statutes which the Lord charged Moses with, *ver. 13.* Though he was to be king of Israel, he must always remember that he was a subject to the God of Israel.

5. He encourageth him to go about this great work, and to go on in it, *ver. 13.* *Be strong and of good courage;* though it is a vast undertaking, thou needest not fear coming under the reproach of the foolish builder, that began to build, and was not able to finish; it is God's work, and it shall come to perfection: *dread not, nor be dismayed.* In our spiritual work as well as in our spiritual warfare, we have need of courage and resolution.

6. He quickens him not to rest in the preparations he had made, but to add thereto, *ver. 14.* Those that enter into the labours of others, and build upon their advantages, must still be improving.

Lastly, He prays for him, *The Lord give thee wisdom and understanding, and give thee charge concerning Israel, ver. 12.* Whatever charge we have, if we see God giving us the charge, and calling us to it, we may hope he will give us wisdom for the discharge of it. Perhaps Solomon had an eye to this prayer of his father for him, in that prayer of his for himself, *Lord, give me a wife and understanding heart.* He concludes, *ver. 16.* *Up and be doing, and the Lord be with thee.* Hope of God's presence must not slacken our endeavour; though the Lord be with us, we must rise and be doing, which if we do we have reason to believe he is, and will be with us. Work out your salvation, and God will work in you.

17. ¶ David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, *saying, 18.* Is not the LORD your God with you? and hath he not given you rest on every side? for he hath given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand, and the land is subdued before the LORD, and before his people. 19. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD.

David here engageth the princes of Israel to assist Solomon in the great work he had to do, and every one to lend him a hand towards the carrying of it on. They that are in the throne cannot do the good they would, unless those about the throne set in with them. David would therefore have the princes to advise Solomon, and quicken him, and make the work as easy to him as they could, by promoting it every one in his place.

1. He shews them what obligations they lay under to be zealous in this matter, in gratitude to God for the great things he had done for them: he had given them victory, and rest, and a good land for an inheritance, *ver. 18.* The more God has done for us, the more we should study to do for him.

2. He presseth that upon them which would make them zealous in it, *ver. 19.* *Set your heart and soul to seek God,* place your happiness in his favour, and keep your eye upon his glory; seek him as your chief good and highest end, and this with your heart and soul; make religion your choice and business, and then you will stick at no pains or cost to promote the building of his sanctuary. Let but the heart be sincerely engaged for God, and the hand and head, the estate and interest and all will be cheerfully employed for him.

C H A P. XXIII.

David having given charge concerning the building of the temple, in this and the following chapters settles the method of the temple service, and puts into order the offices and officers of it. In the late irregular times, and during the wars in the beginning of his reign, we may suppose, though the Levitical ordinances were kept up, yet not in that order, nor with that beauty and exactness that was desirable. Now David being a prophet as well as a prince, by divine warrant and direction set in order the things that were wanting. In this chapter, (1.) He declared Solomon to be his successor, *ver. 1.* (2.) He numbered the Levites, and appointed them to their respective offices, *ver. 2—5.* (3.) He took an account of the several families of the Levites, *ver. 6—23.* (4.) He made a new reckoning of them from twenty years old, and appointed their work, *ver. 24—32.* And in this he prepared for the temple as truly as when he laid up gold and silver for it, for the place is of small account in the work.

1. SO when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel. 2. ¶ And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. 3. Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand. 4. Of which, twenty and four thousand were to

set forward the work of the house of the LORD: and six thousand were officers and judges. 5. Moreover, four thousand were porters, and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made (*said David*) to praise therewith. 6. And David divided them into courses among the sons of Levi, namely, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 7. ¶ Of the Gershonites were Laadan, and Shimei. 8. The sons of Laadan; the chief was Jehiel, and Zetham, and Joel, three. 9. The sons of Shimei; Shelomith, and Haziel, and Haran, three. These were the chief of the fathers of Laadan. 10. And the sons of Shimei were, Jahath, Zina, and Jeush, and Beriah. These four were the sons of Shimei. 11. And Jahath was the chief, and Zizah the second: but Jeush and Beriah had not many sons: therefore they were in one reckoning, according to their father's house. 12. ¶ The sons of Kohath; Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, four. 13. The sons of Amram; Aaron and Moses; And Aaron was separated, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the LORD, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever. 14. Now concerning Moses the man of God, his sons were named of the tribe of Levi. 15. The sons of Moses were Gershon and Eliezer. 16. Of the sons of Gershon, Shebuel was the chief. 17. And the sons of Eliezer were Rehabiah the chief. And Eliezer had none other sons: but the sons of Rehabiah were very many. 18. Of the sons of Izhar; Shelomith the chief. 19. Of the sons of Hebron; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jehaziel the third, and Jekamean the fourth. 20. Of the sons of Uzziel; Micah the first, and Jesiah the second. 21. ¶ The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi: the sons of Mahli; Eleazar and Kish. 22. And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but daughters: and their brethren the sons of Kish took them. 23. The sons of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jeremoth, three.

Here is, 1. The crown entailed, according to the divine appointment, *ver. 1.* David made Solomon king, not to reign with him, or reign under him, but only to reign after him. This he did, (1.) When he was old and full of days; he was but seventy years old when he died, and yet he was full of days, *satur dierum*, satisfied with living in this world. When he found himself going off, he took care for the kingdom when he was gone, and pleased himself with the hopeful prospects of a happy settlement both in church and state. (2.) He did in parliament, in a solemn assembly of all the princes of Israel, which made Adonijah's attempt to break in upon Solomon's title, and set it aside, notwithstanding this public recognition and establishment of it, the more impudent, impious, and ridiculous. Note, The settling and securing of the crown in the interests of the temple, is a great blessing to a people, and a great satisfaction to those that are themselves leaving the stage.

2. The Levites numbered, according to the rule in Moses's time, from thirty years old to fifty, *Numb. iv. 2, 3.* Their number in Moses's time, by this rule, was eight thousand five hundred and eighty, *Numb. iv. 47, 48.* but now it was increased above four-fold, much more in proportion than the rest of the tribes, for the serviceable men of Levi's tribe, were now thirty-eight thousand; unless we suppose, that here those were reckoned who were above fifty, which were not there. Joab had not numbered the Levites, *chap. xxi. 6.* but David now did, not in pride, but for a good purpose, and then he needed not fear wrath for it.

3. The Levites distributed to their respective posts, *ver. 4, 5.* that every hand might be employed; for of all men, an idle Levite makes a very ill figure, and that every part of the work might be carefully done. Now, (1.) It was for the honour of God, that so great a number of servants attended his house, and the business of it; much of the state of great men consists in the greatness of their retinue; when God kept house in Israel, see what a great household he had, and all well fed and taught. But what were these to the attendants of this throne above, an innumerable company of angels? (2.) It was the happiness of Israel, that they had among them such a considerable body of men, who were obliged by their office to promote and keep up religion among them. If the worship of God go to decay in Israel, let it not be said, it was for want of due provision for the support of it, but that they who should have done it, were careless and false.

The work assigned the Levites was four-fold. (1.) Some, and indeed far the greater number, were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. Twenty-four thousand, almost two thirds, were appointed for this service, to attend the priests in killing the sacrifices; slaying them; washing them; cutting them up; burning them, to have the meat-offering and drink offering ready; to carry out dirt, and to keep all the vessels and utensils of the temple clean, and every thing in its place, that the service might be performed both with expedition and with exactness. These served a thousand a week, and so went round in twenty-four courses. Perhaps while the temple was in building, some of these were employed to set forward that work, to assist the builders, at least to quicken them, and keep good order among them, and the decorum which became temple-work. (2.) Others were officers and judges, not in the affairs of the temple, and in controversies that arose there, for there we may suppose the priests presided. But in the country, they were magistrates to give the laws of God in charge, to resolve difficulties, and to determine controversies that arose upon them. Of these there were four thousand in the several parts of the kingdom, that assisted the princes and elders in every tribe, in the administration of justice. (3.) Others were porters to guard all the avenues of the house of God, to examine them that desired entrance, and to resist those that would force an entrance. These were the life-guards of the temple, and probably were armed accordingly. (4.) Others were singers, and players on instruments, whose business it was to keep that part of the service; this was a new erected office.

4. The Levites mustered, and disposed of into their respective families and kindreds, that an account of them might the better be kept, and those that neglected their duty might the easier be discovered by calling over the roll and obliging them to answer to their names, which each family might do

do for itself. When those of the same family were employed together, it would engage them to love and assist one another. When Christ sent forth his disciples two and two, those that were brethren he put together. Two families were here joined in one, ver. 11. because they had not many sons. Those that are weak and little separately, may be put together and make a figure.

That which is most observable in this account of the families of the Levites is, that the posterity of Moses (that great man) stood upon the level with common Levites, and had no dignities or privileges at all peculiar to them; while the posterity of Aaron were advanced to the priest's office, to *sanctify the most holy things*, ver. 13. It is said indeed of the grandson of Moses, Rehabiah, that *his sons were highly multiplied*, ver. 17. marg. When God proposed to him, that if he would let fall his intercession for Israel, he would make of him a great nation, he generously refused it, in recompence of which, his family is here greatly increased, and makes up in number what it wants in figure in the tribe of Levi. Now, (1.) The leveling of Moses's family with the rest, is an evidence of his self-denial: Such an interest had he both with God and man, that if he had aimed to raise his own family, to dignify and enrich that, he might have easily done it; but he was no self-seeking man, and so it appeared, when he left to his children no marks of distinction; which was a sign he had the Spirit of God, and not the spirit of the world. (2.) The elevation of Aaron's family above the rest, was a recompence of his self-denial. When Moses (his younger brother) was made a god to Pharaoh, and he only his prophet or spokesman, to observe his orders, and to do as he was bidden; Aaron never disputed it, nor insisted upon his seniority, but readily took the inferior post God put him in, submitted to Moses, and upon occasion, called him his lord; and because he thus submitted himself in his own person to his junior, in compliance with the will of God, God highly exalted his family, even above that of Moses himself. Those that are content to stoop, are in the fairest way to rise. Before honour is humility.

24. ¶ These were the sons of Levi after the house of their fathers; even the chief of the fathers, as they were counted by number of names by their polls, that did the work for the service of the house of the LORD, from the age of twenty years and upward. 25. For David said, The LORD God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever; 26. And also unto the Levites: they shall no more carry the tabernacle, nor any vessels of it for the service thereof. 27. For by the last words of David, the Levites were numbered from twenty years old and above. 28. Because their office was to wait on the sons of Aaron, for the service of the house of the LORD, in the courts, and in the chambers, and in the purifying of all holy things, and the work of the service of the house of God; 29. Both for the shew-bread, and for the fine flour for meat-offering, and for the unleavened cakes, and for that which is baken in the pan, and for that which is fried, and for all manner of measure and size: 30. And to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even: 31. And to offer all burnt-sacrifices unto the LORD in the sabbaths, in the new-moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them continually before the LORD: 32. And that they should keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the holy place, and the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren, in the service of the house of the LORD.

Here is, 1. An alteration made in the computation of the effective men of the Levites, that whereas in Moses's time they were not listed, nor taken into service till they were thirty years old, nor admitted as probationers till twenty-five, *Numb. viii. 24.* David ordered by direction from God, that they should be numbered for the service of the house of the Lord, from the age of twenty years and upwards, ver. 24. This order he confirmed by his last words, ver. 27. when he put his last hand to the draught of this establishment, he expressly appointed this to be done for ever after; yet not he, but the Lord. (1.) Perhaps the young Levites not having any work appointed them till twenty-five years old, had many of them got a habit of idleness, or grew addicted to their pleasures, which proved both a blemish to their reputation, and a hindrance to their usefulness afterwards; to prevent which inconvenience, they are set to work, and brought under discipline at twenty years old. Those that will be eminent, must learn to take care, and take pains betimes. 2. When the work of the Levites were to carry burdens, heavy burdens, the tabernacle and furniture of it, God could not call any to it till they were come to their full strength; for he considers our frame, and in service as well as sufferings will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear: But now God had given rest to his people, and made Jerusalem his dwelling-place for ever, so that there was no more occasion to carry the tabernacle, and the vessels thereof, the service was much easier, and what would not over-work them, nor over-load them, if they entered upon it at twenty years old. (3.) Now the people of Israel were multiplied, and there was a more general resort to Jerusalem, and would be when the temple was built, than had ever been to Shiloh, or Nob, or Gibeon, it was requisite there should be more hands employed in the temple-service, that every Israelite that brought an offering might find a Levite ready to assist him. When more work is to be done, it is pity but there should be more workmen fetched in for the doing of it. When the harvest is plentiful, why should the labourers be few?

2. A further account of the Levites work. What the work of the priests was we are told, ver. 30. To sanctify the most holy things, to burn incense before the Lord, and to bless in his name; that work the Levites were not to meddle with, and yet they had work enough, and good work, according to that to which they were appointed, ver. 4, 5. (1.) Those of them that were to set forward the work of the house of God, ver. 4. were therein to wait on the sons of Aaron, ver. 28. were to do the drudgery work (if any work for God, is to be called drudgery) of the house of God, to keep the courts and chambers clean, set things in their places, and have them ready when there was occasion to use them. They were to prepare the shew-bread which the priests were to set on the table, to provide the flour and cakes for the

meat-offerings, that the priests might have every thing ready to their hands. (2.) Those of them that were judges and officers, particularly had an eye upon all measure and size, ver. 29. The standards of all weights and measures were kept in the sanctuary, and the Levites had the care of them to see that they were exact, and to try other weights and measures by them when they were appealed to. (3.) The work of the singers was to thank and praise the Lord, ver. 30. at the offering of the morning and evening sacrifices, and others oblations on the sabbaths, new-moons, &c. ver. 31. Moses appointed that they should blow with trumpets over their burnt-offerings and other sacrifices, and on their solemn days, *Numb. xi. 9.* The sound of which was awful, and might be affecting to the worshippers, but was not articulate, not such a reasonable service as this which David appointed, of singing psalms on those occasions. As the Jewish church grew up from its infancy, it grew more and more intelligent in its devotions, till it came at length in the gospel to put away childish things, *Gal. iv. 3—9.* (3.) The work of the porters (ver. 5.) was to keep the charge of the tabernacle and of the holy place, that none might come nigh but such as were allowed, and those no nearer than was allowed them, ver. 32. They were likewise to keep the charge of the sons of Aaron, to be at their beck, and to go on their errands, who yet are called their brethren, to be a memorandum to the priests, that though they were advanced to a high station, yet they were *hewn out of the same rock* with common Levites, and therefore must not lord it over them, but in all instances treat them as brethren.

C H A P. XXIV.

This chapter gives us a more particular account of the distribution of the priests and Levites into their respective classes, for the more regular discharge of their offices, according to their families. (1.) Of the priests, ver. 1—19. (2.) Of the Levites, ver. 20—31.

NOW these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron: The sons of Aaron; Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 2. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office. 3. And David distributed them, both Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, according to their offices in their service. 5. And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar, than of the sons of Ithamar; and thus were they divided: Among the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen chief men of the house of their fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers. 5. Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of the house of God, were the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar. 6. And Shemaiah the son of Nethaneel the scribe, one of the Levites, wrote them before the king and the princes, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and before the chief of the fathers of the priests and Levites: one principal household being taken for Eleazar, and one taken for Ithamar. 7. Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiiah. 8. The third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, 9. The fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, 10. The seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, 11. The ninth to Jeshuah, the tenth to Shechaniah, 12. The eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, 13. The thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, 14. The fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, 15. The seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Aphises, 16. The nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jechezkel, 17. The one and twentieth to Jachin, the two and twentieth to Gamul, 18. The three and twentieth to Delaiah, the four and twentieth to Maa-ziah. 19. These were the orderings of them in their service to come into the house of the Lord, according to their manner, under Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him.

The particular account of these establishments is of little use to us now; but when Ezra published it, it was of great use to direct their church-affairs after their return from captivity into the old channel again. The title of this record we have, ver. 1. *These are the divisions of the sons of Aaron*; not by which they divided one from another, or were at variance one with another; it is pity there should ever be any such divisions among the sons of Israel but especially among the sons of Aaron: but the distributions of them in order to the dividing of their work among themselves, it was a division which God made, and was made for him.

1. This distribution was made for the more regular discharge of their office. God was, and still is the God of order, and not of confusion: particularly in the things of his worship. Number without order is but a clog, and an occasion of tumult; but when every one hath, and knows, and keeps his place and work, the more the better. In the mystical body every member has its use for the good of the whole, *Rom. xii. 4, 5.* 1 Cor. xii. 12.

2. It was made by lot, that the disposal thereof might be of the Lord, and so all quarrels and contentions might be prevented, and no man could be charged with partiality, nor could any say they had wrong done them: as God is the God of order, so he is the God of peace. Solomon saith of the lot, that it causeth contention to cease.

3. The lot was cast publicly, and with great solemnity, in the presence of the king, princes, and priests, that there might be no room for any fraudulent practices or the suspicion of them. The lot is an appeal to God, and ought to be managed with an agreeable reverence and sincerity. Matthias was chosen to the apostleship by lot with prayer, *Acts i. 24.* And I know not but it might be still used in faith, in parallel cases, as an instituted ordinance. We have here the name of the public notary that was employed in

in writing the names, and drawing the lots, *ver. 6. Shemaiah one of the Levites.*

4. What those priests were chosen to was, to preside in the affairs of the sanctuary, *ver. 5.* in their several courses and turns: that which was to be determined by the lot, was only the precedence, not who should serve, for they chose all the chief men; but who should serve first, and who next, that every one might know his course, and attend in it. The twenty-four chief men of the priests, were sixteen of the house of Eleazar, and eight of Ithamar; for the house of Ithamar might well be supposed to dwindle since the sentence passed on the family of Eli, who was of that house. The method of drawing the lots is intimated, *ver. 6.* one chief household being taken for Eleazar, and one for Ithamar; the sixteen chief names of Eleazar were put in one urn, and eight for Ithamar in another, and they drew out of them alternately, as long as those for Ithamar lasted, and then out of those only for Eleazar; or two for Eleazar, and then one for Ithamar, throughout.

5. Among these twenty-four courses, the eighth is that of Abijah or Abia, *ver. 10.* which is mentioned, *Luke i. 5.* as the course which Zechariah was of, the father of John Baptist; by which it appears, that these courses which David now settled, though interrupted perhaps in the bad reigns, and long broken off by the captivity, yet continued in succession till the destruction of the second temple by the Romans: and each course was called by the name of him in whom it was first founded, as the high priest is here called Aaron, *ver. 19.* because succeeding in his dignity and power, though we read not of any of them that bore that name; whoever was high-priest, must be revered and observed by the inferior priests as their father, as Aaron their father. Christ is high-priest over the house of God, to whom all believers, being made priests, are to be in subjection.

20. ¶ And the rest of the sons of Levi were these: Of the sons of Amram; Shubael: of the sons of Shubael: Jehdeiah. 21. Concerning Rehabiah: of the sons of Rehabiah, the first was Isshiah. 22. Of the Izharites: Shelomoth: of the sons of Shelomoth; Jathath. 23. And the sons of Hebron; Jeriah the first, Amariah the second, Jaaziel the third; Jekameam the fourth. 24. Of the sons of Uzziel; Michah: of the sons of Michah; Shamir. 25. The brother of Michah was Isshiah: of the sons of Isshiah; Zechariah. 26. The sons of Merari were, Mahli and Mushi: the sons of Jaaziah: Beno. 27. ¶ The sons of Merari by Jaaziah; Beno, and Shoham, and Zaccur, and Ibri. 28. Of Mahli came Eleazar, who had no sons. 29. Concerning Kish: the son of Kish was Jerahmeel. 30. The sons of Mushi; Mahli, and Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the sons of the Levites, after the house of their fathers. 31. These likewise cast lots over against their brethren the sons of Aaron, in the presence of David the king, and Zadok and Ahimelech, and the chief of the fathers of the priests and Levites, even the principal fathers, over against their younger brethren.

The Levites here named were most of them mentioned before, *chap. xxiii. 16, &c.* They were of those who were to attend the priests in the service of the house of God, but here mentioned again as heads of the twenty-four courses of the Levites (and about so many are here named) who were to attend the twenty-four courses of the priests; they are therefore said to cast lots over against their brethren (so they are called, not their lords) the sons of Aaron, who were not to lord it over God's clergy, as the original word is, *1 Pet. v. 3.* And that the whole disposal of the affair might be of the Lord, the principal fathers cast lots over against their younger brethren, *i. e.* those that were of the elder house came upon the level with those of the younger families, and took their place, not by seniority, but as God by the lot directed. Note, In Christ no difference is made between bond and free, elder and younger. The younger brethren, if they be faithful and sincere, shall be no less acceptable to Christ than the principal fathers.

C H A P. XXV.

David having settled the courses of those Levites that were to attend the priests in their ministration, proceeds in this chapter to put those into a method that were appointed to be singers and musicians in the temple. Here is, (1.) The persons that were to be employed, *Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, ver. 1.* Their sons, *ver. 2—6.* and other artists, *ver. 7.* (2.) The order in which they were to attend determined by lot, *ver. 8—31.*

1. **M**OREOVER David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophecy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen, according to their service, was: 2. Of the sons of Asaph; Zaccur, and Joseph, and Nethaniah, and Asarelah, the sons of Asaph, under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king. 3. Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiah, Habbabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD. 4. Of Heman: the sons of Heman, Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, and Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, and Romamti-ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth: 5. All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. 6. All these were under the hands of their

father, for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order, to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. 7. So the number of them with their brethren, that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight.

Observe, 1. Singing the praises of God is here called *prophesying, ver. 1.* 2, 3. not that all those who were employed in this service were honoured with the visions of God, or could foretell things to come. Heman indeed is said to be the king's seer in the words of God, *ver. 5.* but the psalms they sung were composed by prophets, and many of them were prophetic, and the edification of the church was intended in it, as well as the glory of God. In Samuel's time, singing the praises of God went by the name of prophesying, *1 Sam. x. 5—xix. 20.* and perhaps that is intended in what St. Paul calls prophesying, *1 Cor. 14—xiv. 24.*

2. This is here called a service, and the persons employed in it workmen, *ver. 1.* not but that it is the greatest liberty and pleasure to be employed in praising God. What is heaven but that? But it intimates, that it is our duty to make a business of it, and stir up all that is within us to it, and that in our present state of corruption and infirmity, it will not be done as it should be done without labour and struggle; we must take pains with our hearts to bring them and keep them to this work, and to engage all that is within us.

3. Here were, in compliance with the temper of that dispensation, a great variety of musical instruments used, *harps, psalteries, cymbals, ver. 1—6.* and here was one that lifted up the horn, *ver. 5. i. e.* used wind-music. The bringing of such concerts of music into the worship of God now, is what none pretend to. But those that use such concerts for their own entertainment, should see themselves obliged to preserve them always very innocent from any thing that favours of immorality or profaneness, by this consideration, that time was when they were sacred, and then they were justly condemned who brought them even into common use, *Amos vi. 5. They invented to themselves instruments of music like David.*

4. The glory and honour of God was principally intended in all this temple music, whether vocal or instrumental: It was to give thanks and praise the Lord, that they were employed, *ver. 3.* It was in the songs of the Lord that they were instructed, *ver. 7. i. e.* for songs in the house of the Lord, *ver. 6.* This agrees with the intention of the perpetuating of psalmody in the gospel-church, which is, to make melody with the heart, in conjunction with the voice, unto the Lord, *Ephes. v. 19.*

5. The order of the king is likewise taken notice of, *ver. 2.* and again, *ver. 6.* In those matters indeed, David acted as a prophet; but his taking care for the due and regular observance of divine institutions, both ancient and modern, is an example to all in authority to use their power for the promoting of religion, and the enforcing of the laws of Christ. Let them thus be ministers of God for good.

6. The fathers presided in this service, *Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, ver. 1.* and the children were under the hands of their father, *ver. 2, 3, 6.* This gives a good example to parents to train up their children, and indeed to all seniors to instruct their juniors in the service of God, and particularly in praising of him, than which there is no part of our work more necessary, nor more worthy to be transmitted to the succeeding generations. It gives also an example to the younger to submit themselves to the elder, whose experience and observation fits them for conduct, and, as far as may be, to do what they do under their hand. It is probable, Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun, were bred up under Samuel, and had their education in the schools of the prophets, which he was the founder and president of; then they were pupils, now they came to be masters: those that would be eminent must begin early, and take time to prepare themselves: This good work of singing God's praises Samuel revived, and set on foot, but lived not to see it brought to the perfection it appears in here. Solomon perfects what David began, so David perfects what Samuel began. Let each in their day do what they can for God and his church, though they cannot carry it so far as they would; when they are gone, God can out of stones raise up others, who shall build upon their foundation, and bring forth the top-stone.

7. There were others also, besides the sons of these three great men, who are called their brethren (probably, because they had been wont to join with them in their private concerts) who were instructed in the songs of the Lord, and were cunning or well-skilled therein, *ver. 7.* They were all Levites, and were in number two hundred eighty and eight. Now, (1.) These were a good number, and a competent number to keep up the service in the house of God; for they were all skilful in the work to which they were called. When David the king was so much addicted to divine poetry and music, many others, all that had a genius for it, applied their studies and endeavours that way. Those do religion a great deal of good service, and bring the exercises of devotion into reputation. (2.) Yet these were but a small number in comparison with the four thousand, whom David appointed thus to praise the Lord, *chap. xxiii. 5.* Where were all the rest when only two hundred and eighty-eight, and those but by twelve in a course, were separated to this service? It is probable, all the rest were divided into as many courses, and were to follow, as these led. Or, perhaps, these were for song in the house of the Lord, *ver. 6.* with whom any that worshipped in the courts of that house might join, and the rest were disposed of all the kingdom over, to preside in the country congregations in this good work; for though the sacrifices instituted by the hand of Moses might be offered but at one place, the psalms penned by David might be sung every where, *1 Tim. ii. 8.*

8. ¶ And they cast lots, ward against ward, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar. 9. Now the first lot came forth for Asaph to Joseph: the second to Gedaliah, who with his brethren and sons were twelve: 10. The third to Zaccur, he, his sons and his brethren, were twelve: 11. The fourth to Izri, he, his sons and his brethren, were twelve: 12. The fifth to Nethaniah, he, his sons and his brethren, were twelve: 13. The sixth to Bukkiah, he, his sons and his brethren were twelve: 14. The seventh to Jeshaiah, he, his sons and his brethren were twelve: 15. The eighth to Jeshaiah, he, his sons and his brethren were twelve: 16. The ninth to Mattaniah, he, his sons and his brethren, were twelve: 17. The tenth to Shimei, he, his sons and his brethren, were twelve: 18. The eleventh

to Azarcel, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 19. The twelfth to Hashabiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 20. The thirteenth to Shubael, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 21. The fourteenth to Mattithiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 22. The fifteenth to Jerimoth, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 23. The sixteenth to Hananiah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 24. The seventeenth to Joshbekashah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 25. The eighteenth to Hanani, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 26. The nineteenth to Mallothi, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 27. The twentieth to Eliatha, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 28. The one and twentieth to Hothir, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 29. The two and twentieth to Giddalti, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 30. The three and twentieth to Mahaziah, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve: 31. The four and twentieth to Romamtiezer, *he*, his sons, and his brethren, *were* twelve.

Twenty-four persons were named in the foregoing paragraph, as sons of those three great men, Alaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. Elham was the third, *chap. vi. 44.* but it is likely he was dead before the establishment was perfected, and Jeduthun came in his room. Of these three providence so ordered it that Alaph had four sons, Jeduthun six, and Heman fourteen, in all twenty-four, which were named, *ver. 2, 3, 4.* who were all qualified for the service, and called to it. But the question was, in what order they must serve, and that was determined by lot, to prevent strife for precedence; a sin which most easily begets many, that otherwise are good people.

1. The lot was thrown impartially. They were placed in twenty-four companies, twelve in a company, in two rows, twelve companies in a row, and so they cast lots, *ward against ward*, putting them all upon a level, small and great, teacher and scholar; they did not go according to their age, or according to their standing, or the degrees they had taken in the multi-schools, but it was referred to God, *ver. 8.* small and great, teachers and scholars, stand alike before God, who goes not according to our rules of distinction and precedence. See *Matt. xx. 23.*

2. God determined it as he pleased, probably with regard to the personal merits of the persons, which are much more considerable than seniority of age or priority of birth. Let us compare them with the preceding catalogue, and we shall find that, (1.) Joseph was the second son of Alaph. (2.) Gedaliah eldest son of Jeduthun. (3.) Zaccur the eldest of Alaph. (4.) Izri second son of Jeduthun. (5.) Nathanah third of Alaph. (6.) Bukkiah eldest of Heman. (7.) Jatharelah youngest of Alaph. (8.) Jethaiah third of Jeduthun. (9.) Mattaniah third of Heman. (10.) Shimei youngest of Jeduthun. (11.) Azareel third of Heman. (12.) Hashabiah fourth of Jeduthun. (13.) Shubael fourth of Heman. (14.) Mattithiah fifth of Jeduthun. (15.) Jerimoth fifth of Heman. (16.) Hananiah sixth of Heman. (17.) Joshbekashah eleventh of Heman. (18.) Hanani seventh of Heman. (19.) Mallothi twelfth of Heman. (20.) Eliatha eighth. (21.) Hothir the eleventh. (22.) Giddalti the ninth. (23.) Mahaziah the fourteenth. And lastly, Romamtiezer the tenth of Heman. See how God increased some hands, and preferred the younger before the elder.

3. Each of these had in their chorus the number of twelve, called, *their sons and their brethren*; because they observed them as sons, and concurred with them as brethren. Probably twelve, some for the voice, and others for the instrument, made up the concert. Let us learn with one mind and one mouth to glorify God, and that will be the best concert.

C H A P. XXVI.

*We have here a farther account of the business of the Levites; that tribe had made but a very small figure all the times of the judges, till Eli and Samuel appeared eminent of that tribe. But when David revived religion, the Levites were of all men in the greatest reputation; and happy it was they had Levites that were men of sense, fit to support the honour of their tribe. We have here an account, (1.) Of the Levites that were appointed to be porters, *ver. 1—19.* (2.) Of those that were appointed to be treasurers and store-keepers, *ver. 20—28.* (3.) Of those that were officers and judges in the country, and were intrusted with the administration of public affairs, *ver. 29—32.**

1. Concerning the divisions of the porters: Of the Corbites was Methelemiah the son of Kore, of the sons of Alaph. 2. And the sons of Methelemiah, *were* Zechariah, the first-born, Jedaiel the second, Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, 3. Elam the fifth, Jehohanan the sixth, Elioenai the seventh. 4. Moreover the sons of Obed-edom *were* Shemaiah the first-born, Jehozabad the second, Joab the third, and Sacar the fourth, and Nethaneel the fifth. 5. Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peulthai the eighth: for God blessed him. 6. Also unto Shemaiah his son *were* sons born, that ruled throughout the house of their father: for they *were* mighty men of valour. 7. The sons of Shemaiah; Othni, and Raphael, and Obed, Elzabad, whose brethren *were* strong men; Elihu and Semachiah: 8. All these of the sons of Obed-edom: they and their sons and their brethren, able men for strength for the service, *were* threescore and two of Obed-edom. 9. And Methelemiah had sons and brethren, strong men, eighteen. 10. Also Hofah of the children of Merari had sons; Simri the chief (for *though* he was not the first-born: yet his father made him the chief.) 11. Hilkiah the second, Telbailah the third, Zechariah the fourth: all the sons and brethren of Hofah *were* thirteen. 12. Among these *were* the divisions of the porters, *even* among the chief men *having* wards one against another, to minister in the house of the LORD. 13.

No. LXI*.

¶ And they cast lots as well the small as the great, according to the house of their fathers for every gate. 14. And the lot eastward fell to Shelemiah; then for Zechariah his son (a wife counsellor) they cast lots, and his lot came out northward. 15. To Obed-edom southward, and to his sons the house of Asuppim. 16. To Shuppim and Hofah, *the lot came forth* westward with the gate Shallecheth, by the causeway of the going upward against ward. 17. Eastward *were* six Levites, northward four a day, southward four a day, and toward Asuppim two and two. 18. At Parbar westward, four at the causeway and two at Parbar. 19. These are the divisions of the porters among the sons of Kore, and among the sons of Merari.

Observe, 1. There were porters appointed to attend the temple, who guarded all the avenues that led to it, opened and shut all the outer gates, and attended at them, not only for state, but for service, to direct and instruct those that were going to worship in the courts of the sanctuary, in the decorum they were to observe; to encourage those that were timorous, to send back the strangers and unclean, and to guard against thieves, and others that were enemies to the house of God. In allusion to this office, ministers are said to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven committed to them, *Matt. xvi. 19.* that they may admit and exclude, according to the law of Christ.

2. Of several of those that were called to this service, it is taken notice of, that they were *mighty men of valour*, *ver. 6.* *strong men*, *ver. 7.* *able men*, *ver. 8.* and one of them that *he was a wife counsellor*, *ver. 14.* who, probably, when he had *used this office as a deacon well*, and gave proofs of more than ordinary wisdom, *purchased to himself a good degree*, and was preferred from the gate to the council-board, *1 Tim. iii. 13.* As for those that excelled in strength of body, and courage and resolution of mind, they were thereby qualified for the post assigned them; for whatever service God calls men to, he either finds them fit, or makes them so.

3. The sons of Obed-edom were employed in this office; sixty-two of that family. This was he that entertained the ark with reverence and cheerfulness, and see how he was rewarded for it. (1.) He had *eight sons*, *ver. 5.* *for God blessed him.* The increase and building up of families is owing to the divine blessing; and a great blessing it is to a family to have many children, when they are as those here, able for, and eminent in the service of God. (2.) His sons were preferred to places of trust in the sanctuary. They had faithfully attended the ark in their own house, and now were called to attend it in God's house. He that is truly in a little, shall be trusted with more. He that keeps God's ordinances in his own tent, is fit to have the custody of them in God's tabernacle, *1 Tim. iii. 1, 5.* *I have kept thy law*, saith David, *and this I had, because I kept thy precepts*, *Psalm. cxix. 55, 56.*

4. It is said of one here, that *though he was not the first-born, yet his father made him the chief*, *ver. 10.* either because he was very excellent, or because the elder son was very weak. He was made chief, perhaps not in inheriting the estate, for that was forbidden by the law, *Deut. xxi. 16, 17.* but in this service, which required personal qualifications.

5. The porters, as the singers, had their post assigned them by lot; so many at such a gate, and so many at such a one, that every one might know his post, and make it good, *ver. 13.* It is not said they were cast into twenty-four courses, as before, but here are the names of about twenty-four, *ver. 1—11.* and the posts assigned are twenty-four, *ver. 17, 18.* We have therefore reason to think they were distributed into so many companies. Happy they who dwell in God's house! for as they are well fed, well taught, and well employed, so they are well guarded. Men attended at the gates of the temple, but angels at the gates of the New Jerusalem, *Rev. xxi. 12.*

20. And of the Levites, Ahijah was over the treasures of the house of God, and over the treasures of the dedicated things. 21. As concerning the sons of Laadan: the sons of the Gerthomite Laadan, chief fathers, *even* of Laadan the Gerthomite *were*, Jehieli. 22. The sons of Jehieli; Zetham, and Joel his brother, *which were* over the treasures of the house of the LORD. 23. Of the Amramites, and the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites: 24. And Shebuel the son of Gerthom the son of Moses, *was* ruler of the treasures. 25. And his brethren by Eliezer; Rehabiah his son, and Jethaiah his son, and Joram his son, and Zichri his son, and Shelomith his son. 26. Which Shelomith, and his brethren, *were* over all the treasures of the dedicated things, which David the king, and the chief fathers, the captains over thousands and hundreds, and the captains of the host had dedicated. 27. Out of the spoils won in battles, did they dedicate to maintain the house of the LORD. 28. And all that Samuel the seer, and Saul the son of Kish, and Abner the son of Ner, and Joab the son of Zeruiah had dedicated, *and* whosoever had dedicated *any thing*, it was under the hand of Shelomith, and of his brethren.

Observe, 1. There were *treasures of the house of God*: A great house cannot be well kept without stores of all manner of provisions. Much was expended daily upon the altar, flour, wine, oil, salt, fuel, besides the lambs; quantities of these were to be kept beforehand, besides the sacred vestments and utensils. These were the *treasures of the house of God*. And because money answers all things, doubtless they had a great deal of cash, which was received from the people's offerings, wherewith they bought in what they had occasion for. And, perhaps, much was laid up for an exigence. These treasures typified the plenty there is in our heavenly Father's house, enough and to spare. In Christ, the true temple, are hid *treasures of wisdom, and knowledge, and unspeakable riches.*

2. There were *treasures of dedicated things*; dedicated mostly out of the spoils won in battle, *ver. 27.* as a grateful acknowledgment of the divine protection. Abraham gave Melchisedec the *tenth of the spoils*, *Heb. vii. 4.* In Moses's time, the officers of the army, when they returned victorious, brought of their spoils an *oblation to the Lord*, *Numb. xxxi. 50.* Of late this pious custom had been revived, and not only Samuel and David, but Saul, and Abner, and Joab, had dedicated of their spoils to the honour

and support of the house of God, ver. 28. Note, The more God bestows upon us, the more he expects from us in works of piety and charity. Great is his call for proportionable returns. When we look over our estates, we should consider, here are convenient things, rich things, it may be, and fine things; but where are the dedicated things? Men of war must honour God with their spoils. 3. These treasures had treasurers, those that were over them, ver. 20, 26, whose business it was to keep them, that neither *moth nor rust* might corrupt them, nor *thieves break through to steal*; to give out as there was occasion, and to see that they were not wasted, embezzled, or alienated to any common use: and, it is probable, they kept accounts of all that was brought in, and how it was laid out.

29. ¶ Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons were for the outward business over Israel, for officers and judges. 30. And of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brethren, men of valour, a thousand and seven hundred, were officers among them of Israel on this side Jordan westward, in all the business of the LORD, and in the service of the king. 31. Among the Hebronites was Jerijah the chief, even among the Hebronites, according to the generations of his fathers. In the fortieth year of the reign of David, they were sought for, and there were found among them mighty men of valour, at Jezer of Gilead. 32. And his brethren, men of valour, were two thousand and seven hundred chief fathers, whom king David made rulers over the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, for every matter pertaining to God, and affairs of the king.

All the offices in the house of God being well provided with Levites, we have here an account of those that were employed as officers and judges in the outward business, which must not be neglected, no, not for the temple itself. The magistracy is an ordinance of God for the good of the church, as truly as the ministry is. And here we are told,

1. That the Levites were employed in the administration of justice in concurrence with the princes and elders of the several tribes, who could not be supposed to understand the law so well as the Levites, who made it their business to study it. None of those Levites who were employed in the service of the sanctuary, none of the singers or porters were concerned in this outward business; either one was enough to engage the whole man; and it was presumption for any to undertake both.

2. Their charge was both, in all business of the Lord, and in the service of the king, ver. 30. and again, ver. 32. they managed the affairs of the country, as well ecclesiastical as civil, took care both of God's tithes and the king's taxes, punished offences committed immediately against God and his honour, and those against the government and the public peace, guarded both against idolatry and against injustice, and took care to put the laws in execution against both. Some, it is likely, applied themselves to the affairs of religion; others to secular affairs; and so, between both, God and the king were well served. It is happy with a kingdom, when its civil and sacred interests are thus twisted, and jointly minded and advanced.

3. There were more Levites employed as judges with the two tribes and a half on the other side Jordan, than with all the rest of the tribes; there were two thousand seven hundred: whereas on the west side of Jordan, there was but one thousand seven hundred, ver. 30, 32. Either those remote tribes were not so well furnished as the rest with judges of their own, or because they, lying farthest from Jerusalem, and on the borders of the neighbouring nations, were most in danger of being infected with idolatry, and most needed the help of Levites to prevent it. The frontiers must be well guarded.

4. This is said to be done (as were all the foregoing settlements) in the fortieth year of the reign of David, ver. 31. that was the last year of his reign. We should be so much the more industrious to do good, as we see the day approaching. If we live not to enjoy the fruit of our labours, grudge it not to those that shall come after us.

C H A P. XXVII.

In this chapter we have the civil list, including the military. (1.) The twelve captains for every second month of the year, ver. 1—15. (2.) The princes of the several tribes, ver. 16—24. (3.) The officers of the court, ver. 25—34.

1. **N**OW the children of Israel after their number, to wit, the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month, throughout all the months of the year, of every course were twenty and four thousand. 2. Over the first course for the first month, was Jathobeam the son of Zabdiel: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 3. Of the children of Perez, was the chief of all the captains of the host for the first month. 4. And over the course of the second month, was Dodai an Ahohite, and of his course was Mikloth also the ruler: in his course likewise were twenty and four thousand. 5. The third captain of the host for the third month, was Benaiah the son of Jehoiada a chief priest: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 6. This is that Benaiah, who was mighty among the thirty, and above the thirty: and in his course was Ammizabad his son. 7. The fourth captain for the fourth month, was Afahel the brother of Joab, and Zebadiah his son after him: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 8. The fifth captain for the fifth month, was Shambhuth the Izrahite: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 9. The sixth captain for the sixth month, was Ira the son of Ikkeiah the Tekoite: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 10. The seventh captain for the seventh month, was Helez the Pelonite, of

the children of Ephraim: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 11. The eighth captain for the eighth month, was Sibbecai the Hushathite, of the Zarahites; and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 12. The ninth captain for the ninth month, was Abiezer the Anetothite, of the Benjamites: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 13. The tenth captain for the tenth month, was Maharai the Netophathite, of the Zarahites: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 14. The eleventh captain for the eleventh month, was Benaiah the Pirathonite, of the children of Ephraim: and in his course were twenty and four thousand. 15. The twelfth captain for the twelfth month, was Heldai the Netophathite, of Othniel: and in his course were twenty and four thousand.

We have here an account of the militia of the kingdom, and the regulation of that. David was himself a man of war, and had done great things with the sword; great armies he had brought into the field, now here we are told how he marshalled them when God had given him rest from all his enemies. He did not keep them all together, for that would have been a hardship on them and the country; yet he did not disband and disperse them all, then he had left his kingdom naked, and his people would have forgot the arts of war, wherein they had been instructed. He therefore contrived to keep up a constant force, and yet not a standing army. The model is very prudent.

1. He kept up twenty-four thousand constantly in arms. I suppose in a body, and disciplined, in one part or other of the kingdom; the freeholders carrying their own arms, and bearing their own charges while they were up. This was a sufficient strength for the securing of the public peace and safety. Those that are Israelites indeed, must learn war, for we have enemies to grapple with, whom we are concerned constantly to stand upon our guard against.

2. He changes them every month; so that the whole number of the militia amounted to two hundred eighty eight thousand, perhaps, about a fifth part of the able men of the kingdom. By distributing them thus into twelve courses, they were all instructed in, and accustomed to, military exercises, and yet none were compelled to be in service, and upon charge above one month in the year, which they might very well afford, unless upon extraordinary occasions, and then they might be all got together presently. It is the wisdom of governors, and much their praise, while they provide for the public safety, to contrive how to make it effectual, and yet easy, and as little as possible burdensome to the people.

3. Every course had a commander in chief over it, besides the subaltern officers that were rulers of thousands, and hundreds, and fifties; there was one general officer to each course, or legion. All these twelve great commanders are mentioned among David's worthies and champions, 2 Sam. xxiii. and 1 Chron. xi. They had first signalized themselves by great actions, and then they were advanced to those great preferments. It is well with a kingdom when honour thus attends merit. Benaiah is here called a chief priest, ver. 5. But *cohen* signifying both a priest and a prince, it might better be translated here a chief ruler, or (as in the margin) a principal officer. Dodia had Mikloth (ver. 4.) either for his substitute when he was absent or infirm, or for his successor when he was dead. Benaiah had his son under him, ver. 6. Afahel had his son after him, ver. 7. and by that, it seems, that this plan of the militia was laid in the beginning of David's reign; for Afahel was killed by Abner while David reigned in Hebron. And when his wars were over he revived this method, and left the military affairs in this posture, for the peaceable reign of his son Solomon. When we think ourselves most safe, yet while we are here in the body, we must keep in a readiness for spiritual conflicts: Let not him that girdeth on the harness, boast as he that puts it off.

16. ¶ Furthermore, over the tribes of Israel: the ruler of the Reubenites was Eliezer the son of Zichri: of the Simeonites, Shephatiah the son of Maachah: 17. Of the Levites, Hashabiah the son of Kemuel: of the Aaronites, Zadok: 18. Of Judah, Elihu, one of the brethren of David: of Issachar, Omri the son of Michael: 19. Of Zebulun, Ihmaiah the son of Obadiah: of Naphtali, Jerimoth the son of Azriel. 20. Of the children of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Azaziah: of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joel the son of Pedaiah: 21. Of the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead, Iddo the son of Zecariah: of Benjamin, Jaafiel the son of Abner. 22. Of Dan, Azareel the son of Jeroham. These were the princes of the tribes of Israel. 23. ¶ But David took not the number of them from twenty years old and under: because the LORD had said, he would increase Israel like to the stars of the heavens. 24. Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but he finished not, because there fell wrath for it against Israel, neither was the number put in the account of the chronicles of king David. 25. ¶ And over the king's treasures was Azmaveth the son of Adiel: and over the store-houses in the fields, in the cities, and in the villages, and in the castles, was Jehonathan the son of Uziah. 26. And over them that did the work of the field for tillage of the ground was Ezri the son of Chelub. 27. And over the vineyards was Shimei the Ramathite: over the increase of the vineyards for the vine-cellars, was Zabdi the Shiphmite: 28. And over the olive-trees, and the sycamore-trees, that were in the low plains, was Baal-hanan the Gederite: and over the cellars of oil was Joash. 29. And over the herds that fed in Sharon, was Shitrai the Sharonite: and over the herds that were in the valleys, was Shaphat the son of Adlai. 30. Over the camels also was Obil the Ihmaelite: and over the asses, was Jehdeiah the

the Meronothite. 31. And over the flocks, *was* Jaziz the Hagerite. All these *were* the rulers of the substance which *was* king David's. 32. Also Jonathan David's uncle *was* a counsellor, a wise man, and a scribe: and Jehiel the son of Hachmoni *was* with the king's sons, 33. And Ahithophel *was* the king's counsellor, and Hushai the Archite *was* the king's companion. 34. And after Ahithophel, *was* Jehoiada, the son of Benaiah, and Abiathar: and the general of the king's army *was* Joab.

We have here an account,

1. Of the princes of the tribe: something of the ancient order instituted by Moses in the wilderness was still kept up, that every tribe should have its prince or chief. It is probable, it was kept up all along, either by election, or by succession in the same family; and those are here named, who were found in that office when this account was taken. Elihu, or Eliab, who was prince of Judah, was the eldest son of Jesse, and descended in a right line from Nahshon and Salmon, the princes of this tribe in Moses's time. Whether these princes were in the nature of lord lieutenants, that guided them in their military affairs, or chief justices that presided in their courts of judgment, doth not appear. Their power we may suppose much less now all the tribes were united under one king than it had been when for the most part they acted separately. Our religion obligeth us to be subject not only to the king as supreme, but unto governors under him. 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14. the princes that decree justice. Of Benjamin, was Jaziel the son of Abner, *ver.* 21. Though Abner was David's enemy, and opposed his coming to the crown, yet David would not oppose the preferment of his son, but, perhaps, nominated him to this post of honour; which teaches us to render good for evil.

2. Of the numbering the people, *ver.* 23, 24. It is here said, (1.) That when David ordered the people to be numbered, he forbade the numbering of those under twenty years old, thinking thereby to save the reflection, which what he did, might otherwise cast upon the promise that they should be innumerable: yet it was but a poor salvo; for those under twenty never were used to be numbered, and the promise of their numbers, chiefly respected the effective men. (2.) That that account which David took of the people in the pride of his heart, turned to no good account, for it was never perfected nor done with exactness, nor was it ever recorded as an authentic account; Joab was sick of it, and did it by halves: David was ashamed of it, and willing it should be forgotten, because there fell wrath for it against Israel. A good man cannot in the reflection please himself with that, which he knows God is displeased with; cannot make use of that, nor take comfort in that which is obtained by sin.

3. Of the officers of the court.

(1.) The rulers of the king's substance; as they are called, *ver.* 31. such as had the oversight and charge of the king's tillage, his vineyards, his olive-yards, his herds, his camels, his asses, his flocks. Here are no officers for state, none for sport, no master for the wardrobe, no master of the ceremonies, no master of the horse, no master of the hounds, but all for substance, agreeable to the simplicity and plainness of those times. David was a great soldier, a great scholar, and a great prince, and yet a great husband of his estate, kept a great deal of ground in his own hand, and stocked it, not for pleasure, but profit; for the king himself is *servant of the field*, Eccl. v. 9. and those magistrates that would have their subjects industrious, must be themselves examples of industry, and application to business, however, afterwards the poor of the land were thought good enough to be vine-dressers and husbandmen; now David put his great men to preside in those employments.

2. The attendants on the king's person. They were such as were eminent for wisdom, being designed for converse. His uncle, that was a wise man, and a scribe, not only well skilled in politics, but well read in the scriptures, was his counsellor, *ver.* 34. Another, who no doubt excelled in learning and prudence, was tutor to his children; Ahithophel, a very cunning man, was his counsellor; but Hushai, an honest man, was his companion and confident. It doth not appear that he had many counsellors; but those he had were men of great abilities. Much of the wisdom of princes is seen in the choice of their ministry. But David, though he had all these trusty and well-beloved counsellors about him, preferred his bible before them all, *Psalms* cxix. 24. *Thy testimonies are my delights, and my counsellors.*

C H A P. XXVIII.

The account we had of David's exit in the beginning of the first book of Kings, does not make his son near so bright, as this here, in this and the following chapter, where we have his solemn farewell both to his son and his subjects, and must own that he finished well. In this chapter we have, (1.) A general convention of the states summoned to meet, *ver.* 1. (2.) A solemn declaration of the divine entail both of the crown, and of the honour of building the temple, upon Solomon, *ver.* 2—7. (3.) An exhortation both to the people, and to Solomon, to make religion their business, *ver.* 8—10. (4.) The model and materials delivered to Solomon for the building of the temple, *ver.* 11—19. (5.) Encouragement giving him to undertake it, and proceed in it, *ver.* 20, 21.

1. **A**ND David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men unto Jerusalem. 2. Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people, *As for me*, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: 3. But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou *hast been* a man of war, and *hast shed blood*. 4. Howbeit, the

LORD God of Israel chose me before all the house of my father, to be king over Israel for ever: for he hath chosen Judah to be the ruler; and of the house of Judah, the house of my father, and among the sons of my father, he liked me to make me king over all Israel: 5. And of all my sons (for the LORD hath given me many sons) he hath chosen Solomon my son, to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. 6. And he said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build my house and my courts: for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. 7. Moreover, I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandments and my judgments, as at this day. 8. Now therefore in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the LORD, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the LORD your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever. 9. ¶ And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. 10. Take heed now, for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it.

A great deal of service David had done in his day, had *served his generation according to the will of God*, Acts xiii. 36. But now the time draws nigh that he must die, and, as a type of the Son of David, the nearer he comes to his end, the more busy he is, and doth his work with all his might. He is now a little recovered from that ill fit he had, 1 Kings i. 1. *when they covered him with cloaths and he got no heat*: But what cure is there for old age? He therefore improves his recovery, as giving him an opportunity of doing God and his country a little more service.

1. He summons all the great men, to attend him, that he might take leave of them all together, *ver.* 1. Thus Moses did, *Deut.* xxxi. 28. and Joshua *chap.* xxiii. 2.—xxiv. 1. David would not declare the settlement of the crown, but in the presence and to the satisfaction of those that were the representatives of the people.

2. He addresseth himself to them, with a great deal of respect and tenderness. He not only made a shift to get out of his bed to give them a meeting, the occasion putting new spirits into him, but he rose out of his chair, and stood up upon his feet, *ver.* 2. in reverence to God, whose will he was to declare, and in reverence to this solemn assembly of the Israel of God, as if he looked upon himself, though *major singulis*, yet *minor universis*. His age and infirmities as well as his honour might well have allowed him to keep his seat, but he would shew that he was indeed humbled for the pride of his heart, both in the numbers of his people, and his dominion over them. Then it was too much his pleasure that they were all his servants, *chap.* xxi. 3. now he calls them his brethren, whom he loved, his people, whom he took care of, not his servants, whom he had the command of. *Hear me my brethren and my people*. It becomes superiors thus to speak with affection and condescension, even to their inferiors: They will be not the less honoured for it, but the more loved. Thus he engages their attention to what he was about to say.

3. He declares the purpose he had to build a temple for God, and God's disallowing of that purpose, *ver.* 2, 3. This he had signified to Solomon before, *chap.* xxii. 7, 8. A house of rest for the ark, is here laid to be a house of rest for the footstool of our God, for the heaven is his throne of glory; the earth and the most magnificent temples that can be built upon it is but his footstool. So much difference is there between the manifestations of the divine glory, in the upper and the lower world. Angels surround the throne, *Isa.* vi. 1. We poor worms do but *worship at his footstool*, *Psalms* xcix. 5.—cxxxii. As an evidence of the sincerity of his purpose to build the temple, he tells them he had made ready for it, but God would not suffer him to proceed, because he had cut out other work for him to do, which was enough for one man to do, *viz.* The managing of the wars of Israel; he must serve the public with the sword, another must do it with the line and the plummet. Times of rest are building times, Acts ix. 31.

4. He produceth his own title first, and then Solomon's to the crown, both were undoubtedly *jure divino*: They could make out such a title as no monarch on earth can, the Lord God of Israel chose them both immediately, by prophecy not providence, *ver.* 4, 5. No right of primogeniture is pretended, *deter digniori*, not *seniori*: (1.) Judah was not the eldest son of Jacob, yet God chose that tribe to be the ruling tribe, and Jacob entailed the scepter upon it, *Gen.* xlix. 10. (2.) It doth not appear that the family of Jesse was the senior house of that tribe; from Judah it is certain it was not, for Shelah was before Pharez: whether from Nahshon, and Salmon, is not certain. Ram, the father of Nahshon had an elder brother, 1 Chron. ii. 9. perhaps so had Boaz, Obed, Jesse, yet God chose the house of my father. (3.) David was the youngest son of Jesse, yet God liked him to make him king, so it seemed good unto him. God takes whom he likes, and likes whom he makes like him, as he did David, as man after his own heart. (4.) Solomon was one of the youngest sons of David, and yet God chose him to sit upon the throne, because he was the likeliest of them all to build the temple, the wisest and best inclined.

5. He opens to them God's gracious purposes concerning Solomon, *ver.* 6, 7. *I have chosen him to be my son*. Thus he declares the decree, that the Lord had said to Solomon, as a type of Christ, *Thou art my son*, *Psalms* ii. 7. the son of my love; for he was the son of Jedidiah, because the Lord loved him, and Christ is his beloved son. Of him God said, as a figure of him that was to come, (1.) *He shall build my house*. Christ is both the founder and the foundation of the gospel-temple. (2.) *I will establish his kingdom for ever*. This must have its accomplishments in the kingdom of the Messiah, which shall continue in his hands through all the ages of time, *Isa.* ix. 7. *Luke* i. 33. and shall then be delivered up to God, even the Father, yet perhaps to be delivered back to the Redeemer for ever. As to Solomon, this promise of the establishment of his kingdom, is here made conditional, *If he be constant to my commandment, as at this day*. Solomon was now very towardsly and good; if he continue so, his kingdom shall continue, otherwise not. Note, If we be constant in our duty, then, and not otherwise

otherwise, we may expect the continuance of God's favour. Let those that are well taught and begin well, take notice of this, if they be content, they are happy: perseverance wears the crown, though it wins it not.

6. He charges them to adhere steadfastly to God and their duty, *ver. 8.* Observe, (1.) The matter of this charge: *keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God.* The Lord was their God, his commandments must be their rule, they must have respect to them all, must make conscience of keeping them, and in order thereunto must seek for them, *i. e.* must be inquisitive concerning their duty, search the scriptures, take advice, seek the law at their mouth, whose lips were to keep this knowledge, and pray to God to teach and direct them. God's commandments will not be kept without great care. (2.) The solemnity of it: He chargeth them in the sight of all Israel, who would all have notice of this public charge, and in the audience of their God. God is witness, and this congregation is witnesses that they had good counsel given them, and fair warning; if they do not take it, it is their fault, and God and man will be witness against them. See *1 Tim. v. 21.* *2 Tim. iv. 1.* Those that profess religion, as they tender the favour of God, and their reputation with men must be faithful to their profession. (3.) The motive to observe this charge; it was the way to be happy, to have the peaceable possession of this good land themselves, and to preserve the entail of it upon their children.

7. He concludes with a charge to Solomon himself, *ver. 9, 10.* He is much concerned that he should be religious. He was to be a great man, but he must not think religion below him; a wise man, and this would be his wisdom. Observe, (1.) The charge he gives him. He must look upon God as the God of his father, his good father, who had devoted him to God, and educated him for God. He was born in God's house, and therefore bound in duty to be his; brought up in his house, and therefore bound in gratitude. *Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not.* He must know God and serve him; we cannot serve God aright, if we do not know him; and in vain do we know him, if we do not serve him: Serve him with heart and mind; we make nothing of religion if we do not mind it, and make heart-work of it: Serve him with a perfect, *i. e.* an upright heart; for sincerity is our gospel perfection; and with a willing mind, from a principle of love, and as a willing people, cheerfully and with pleasure. 2. The arguments to enforce this charge: Two arguments of general inducement. (1.) That the secrets of our souls are open before God, he searcheth all hearts, even the hearts of kings, which to men are unsearchable, *Prov. xxv. 3.* We must therefore be sincere, because if we deal deceitfully, God sees it, and cannot be imposed upon; must therefore employ our thoughts, and engage them in God's service, because he fully understands all the imaginations of them, both good and bad. (2.) That we are happy or miserable here and for ever, according as we do or do not serve God; *if we seek him diligently he will be found of us,* and that is enough to make us happy, *Heb. xi. 6.* If we forsake him, desert his service, and turn from following him, he will cast us off for ever, and that is enough to make us miserable. Note, God never cast any off till they have first cast him off. Here is one argument peculiar to Solomon, *ver. 10.* *Thou art to build an house for the sanctuary,* therefore seek and serve God, that that work may be done from a good principle, in right manner, and may be accepted. 3. The means prescribed in order hereunto, and they are prescribed to us all. (1.) Caution; take heed; beware of every thing that looks like, or leads to that which is evil. (2.) Courage; be strong and do it. We cannot do our work as we should, unless we put on resolution, and fetch in strength from divine grace.

11. ¶ Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy-seat, 12. And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things. 13. Also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the LORD. 14. He gave of gold by weight, for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service, silver also for all instruments of silver, by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service: 15. Even the weight for the candlesticks of gold, and for their lamps of gold, by weight for every candlestick, and for the lamps thereof: and for the candlesticks of silver by weight, both for the candlestick, and also for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candlestick. 16. And by weight he gave gold for the tables of shew-bread, for every table, and likewise silver for the tables of silver; 17. Also pure gold for the flesh hooks, and the bowls, and the cups: and for the golden basins he gave gold by weight for every basin: and likewise silver by weight for every basin of silver: 18. And for the altar of incense, refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 19. All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern. 20. And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it; fear not nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee, he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the LORD. 21. And behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, even they shall be with thee, for all the service of the house of God, and there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship, every willing skilful man for any manner of service: also the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.

As for the general charge that David gave his son to seek God and serve him, the book of the law was in that his only rule, and there needed no other: But in building the temple, David was now to give him three things.

1. A model of the building; because it was to be such a building as neither he nor his architects ever saw. Moses had a pattern of the tabernacle shewed him in the mount, *Heb. viii. 5.* so had David of the temple, by the immediate hand of God upon him, *ver. 19.* It was given him in writing, probably by the ministry of an angel, or as clearly and exactly represented to his mind, as if it had been in writing: But it is said, *ver. 12.* "He had this pattern by the spirit:" The contrivance either of David's devotion, or of Solomon's wisdom, must not be trusted to in an affair of this nature. The temple must be a sacred thing and a type of Christ, there must be in it not only convenience and decency, but significance; it was a kind of sacrament, and therefore it must not be left to man's art or invention to contrive it; but it must be framed by divine institution. Christ, the true temple, the church, the gospel-temple, and heaven the everlasting temple, are all framed according to the divine councils, and the plan laid in the divine wisdom, ordained before the world for God's glory and ours. This pattern David gave to Solomon, that he might know what to provide, and might go by a certain rule. When Christ left with his disciples a charge to build his gospel-church, he gave them an exact model of it, ordering them to observe that, and that only which he commanded. The particular models are here mentioned; of the porch, which was higher than the rest, like a steeple; then the houses, both the holy place and the most holy, with the rooms adjoining, which were, for treasuries, chambers and parlours, especially the place of the mercy-seat, *ver. 11.* Of the courts likewise, and the chambers about them, in which the dedicated things were laid up. Bishop Patrick supposeth, that among other things, the tabernacle which Moses reared, and all the utensils of it, which there was now no farther occasion for, were laid up here, signifying that in the fulness of time, all the Mosaic economy, all the rites and ceremonies of that dispensation should be decently laid aside, and something better come in their room. He gave him a table of the courses of the priests, patterns of the vessels of service, *ver. 13.* and a pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, *ver. 18.* Besides the two cherubims over the mercy-seat, there were two much larger, whose wings reached from wall to wall, *1 Kings vi. 23.* &c. and of these, David here gave Solomon the pattern, called a chariot; for the angels are the chariots of God, *Psal. lxxviii. 17.*

2. Materials for the most costly of the utensils of the temple. That they might not be made any less than the patterns, he weighed out stuff enough for each vessel, both of gold and silver, *ver. 14.* In the tabernacle there was but one golden candlestick, in the temple ten, *1 Kings vii. 49.* besides silver ones, which, it is supposed, were hand-candlesticks, *ver. 15.* In the tabernacle there was but one table; but in the temple, besides that on which the shew-bread was set, there were ten others for other uses, *2 Chron. iv. 8.* besides silver tables. For this house being much larger than that, it would look bare if it had not furniture proportionable. The gold for the altar of incense, is particularly said to be refined gold, *ver. 18.* purer than any of the rest, for that was typical of the intercession of Christ, than which nothing is more pure and perfect.

3. Directions which way to look for help in this great undertaking. Fear not opposition, fear not the charge, care and trouble, fear not miscarrying in it, as in the case of Uzza, fear not the reproach of the foolish builder, that began to build and was not able to finish. Be not dismayed, (1.) God will help thee, and thou must look upon him in the first place, *ver. 20.* *The Lord God, even my God,* whom I have chosen and served; who has all along been present with me and prospered me, and to whom, from my own experience of his power and goodness, I recommend thee, he will be with thee, to direct, strengthen, and prosper thee; he will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Note, The God that owned our fathers, and carried them through the service of their day, if we be faithful to him, we may be sure will in like manner go along with us in our day, and will never leave us, while he has any work to do in us or by us. The same that was Joshua's encouragement, *Josh. i. 5.* and Solomon's here, is given to all believers, *Heb. xiii. 5.* *He will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* God never leaves any, unless they first leave him. (2.) Good men will help thee, *ver. 21.* The priests and Levites will advise thee, and thou mayest consult with them: Thou hast good workmen, that are both willing and skilful, and those are two very great properties in a workman, especially in those that work at the temple: And lastly, the princes and the people will be wholly at thy commandment, every one ready in his place to further it. Then good work is likely to go on, when all parties concerned are hearty in it, and none secretly clog it, but drive on heartily in it.

C H A P. XXIX.

David had said what he had to say to Solomon. But he had something more to say to the congregation before he parts with them.

(1.) He presseth them to contribute according to their ability towards the building and furnishing of the temple, *ver. 1—3.* (2.) They made their presents accordingly, very generously, *ver. 6—9.* (3.) David offered up solemn prayers and praises to God upon that occasion, *ver. 10—20.* with sacrifices, *ver. 21.* (4.) Solomon was hereupon enthroned with great joy and magnificence, *ver. 22—25.* (5.) David soon after this finished his course, *ver. 26—30.* And it is hard to say which shines brighter here, the setting sun or the rising sun.

1. Furthermore, David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God. 2. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God, the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood: onyx-stones, and stones to be set, glittering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. 3. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, 4. Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents

lents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses *withal*: 5. The gold for *things* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and for all manner of work *to be made* by the hands of artificers. And who *then* is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? 6. ¶ Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands, and of hundreds, with the rulers over the king's work offering willingly. 7. And gave for the service of the house of God, of gold five thousand talents, and ten thousand drams; and of silver, ten thousand talents; and of brass, eighteen thousand talents; and one hundred thousand talents of iron. 8. And they with whom *precious* stones were found, gave *them* to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. 9. Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

We may here observe.

1. How handsomely David spoke to the great men of Israel, to engage them to contribute towards the building of the temple. It is our duty to provoke one another to love and to good works, not only to do good ourselves, but to draw in others to do good as much as we can. There were many very rich men in Israel, they were all to share in the benefit of the temple, and of those peaceable days which were to befriend the building of it, and therefore, though he would not impose it on them as a tax, what they should give towards it, he would propose it to them, as a fair occasion for a free-will offering; because what is done in works of piety and charity should be done willingly, and not by constraint, for God loves a cheerful giver.

(1.) He would have them consider, that Solomon was young and tender, and needed help, but he was the person whom God had chosen to this work, and therefore was well worthy their assistance. It is good service to encourage those in the work of God, that are as yet young and tender.

(2.) The work was great, and all hands should contribute to the carrying of it on; the palace to be built was not for man, but for the Lord God; and the more was contributed towards the building, the more magnificent it would be, and therefore would the better answer the intention.

(3.) He tells them what great preparations had been made for this work; he did not intend to throw all the burden upon them, nor that it should be built wholly by contributions, but that they should shew their good will, by adding to what was done, *ver. 2. I have prepared with all my might, i. e. I have made it my business: Work for God must be done with all our might, or we shall bring nothing to pass in it.*

(4.) He sets them a good example. Besides what was dedicated to this service out of the spoils and presents of the neighbour nations, which was for the building of the house, of which before, *chap. xxii. 14.* he had out of his own share offered largely, for the beautifying and enriching it, three thousand talents of gold, and seven thousand talents of silver, *ver. 4, 5.* and this because he had set his affection to the house of his God: He gave all this, not as papists build churches in commutation of penance, or to make atonement for sin; not as Pharisees give alms, to be seen of men; but purely because he loved the habitation of God's house, so he professed. *Psal. xxvi. 8.* and here he proved it. Those that set their affection upon the service of God, will think no pains or cost too much to bestow upon it. And then our offerings are pleasing to God, when they come from love. They that set their affections on things above, will set their affection on the house of God, through which our way to heaven lies. Now this he gives the men account of, to stir them up to do likewise. Note, Those who would draw others to that which is good, must lead themselves. Those especially, that are advanced above others in place and dignity, should especially contrive how to make their light shine before men, because the influence of their example is more powerful and more extensive than that of other people.

(5.) He stirs them up to do as he had done, *viz. 5. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?* (1.) We must each of us in our several places serve the Lord, and consecrate our service to him, separate it from other things that are foreign, and interfere with it, and direct and design it for the honour and glory of God. (2.) We must make the service of God our business; must fill our hands to the Lord, so the Hebrew phrase is. They that engage themselves in the service of God will have their hands full, there is work enough for the whole man in that service. The filling of our hands with the service of God, intimates that we must serve him only, serve him liberally, and serve him in the strength of grace derived from him. (3.) We must be free herein, do it willingly and speedily, do it this day when we are in a good mind, Who is willing? Now let him shew it.

2. How handsomely they all contributed towards the building of the temple, when they were thus stirred up to it. Though they were persuaded to it, yet it is said they offered willingly, *ver. 6.* So he saith who knew their hearts. Nay, they offered with a perfect heart, from a good principle, and with a sincere respect to the glory of God, *ver. 9.* How generous they were, appears by the sum total of the contributions, *ver. 7, 8.* They gave like themselves, like princes, like princes of Israel. And a pleasant day's work it was: for, (1.) The people rejoiced; which may be meant of the people themselves that offered; they were glad of the opportunity of honouring God thus with their substance, and glad of the prospect of bringing this good work to perfection. Or the common people rejoiced in the generosity of their princes, that they had such rulers over them who were forward to this good work. Every Israelite is glad to see temple-work carried on with vigour. (2.) David rejoiced with great joy, to see the good effect of his prayers, and other helps of devotion he had furnished them with: rejoiced that his son and successor would have those about him that were so well affected to the house of God, and that this work, which his heart was so much upon, was likely to go on. Note, It is a great reviving to good men, when they are leaving the world, to see those they leave behind zealous for religion, and likely to keep it up. *Lord, lettest thou thy servants depart in peace.*

10. ¶ Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever, 11. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all
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that is in the heaven and in the earth, *is thine*; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12. Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine hand is power and might, and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13. Now therefore, our God; we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. 14. But who *am* I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. 15. For we *are* strangers before thee, and sojourners, as *were* all our fathers: our days on the earth *are* as a shadow, and *there is* none abiding. 16. O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thy holy name, *cometh* of thine hand, and *is* all thine own. 17. I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things; and now have I seen with joy, thy people which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. 18. O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee. 19. And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all *these things*, and to build the palace for the which I have made provision. 20. ¶ And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God. And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and worshipped the LORD and the king. 21. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings unto the LORD on the morrow after that day, *even* a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, *and* a thousand lambs, with their drink-offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel: 22. And did eat and drink before the LORD on that day with great gladness, and they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed him unto the LORD *to be* the chief governor, and Zadok *to be* priest.

We have here,

1. The solemn address which David made to God upon occasion of the noble subscriptions of the princes towards the building of the temple, *ver. 10. Wherefore David blessed the Lord*, not only in his closet; but *before all the congregation*: This I expected when we read, *ver. 9.* that *David rejoiced with great joy*; for such a devout man as he, would, no question, make that the matter of his thanksgiving, which was so much the matter of his rejoicing. He that looked round with comfort, would certainly look up with praise. David was now old, and looked upon himself as near his end, and well becomes aged saints and dying saints, to have their hearts much enlarged in praise and thanksgiving: This will silence their complaints of their bodily infirmities, and help to make the prospect of death itself less. David's praises, towards the latter end of the book, are most of them plains of praise. The nearer we come to the world of everlasting praise, the more we should speak the language, and do the work of that world. In this address,

(1.) He adores God, and ascribes glory to him, as the God of Israel, *Blessed for ever and ever*. Our Lord's prayer ends with a doxology much like this which David here begins with, *for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory*. This is properly praising God with holy awe and reverence, and agreeable affection; acknowledging, 1. His infinite perfections; not only that he is great, powerful, glorious, &c. but that his is the greatness, power, and glory, *i. e.* he has them in and of himself; he is the fountain and centre of every thing that is bright and blessed. All that we can in our most exalted praises attribute to him, he has an unquestionable title to. His is the greatness, his greatness is immense and incomprehensible, and all others are little, are nothing, in comparison of him. His is the power, and it is almighty and irresistible; power belongs to him, and all the power of all the creatures is derived from him, and depends upon him: His is the glory: for his glory is his own end, and the end of the whole creation: All the glory we can give him with our hearts, lips and lives, comes infinitely short of what is his due. His is the victory; he transcends and surpasseth all, and is able to conquer and subdue all things to himself, and his victories are uncontested, uncontrollable. And his is the majesty, real and personal; with him is terrible majesty, inexpressible and unconceivable. (2.) His sovereign dominion; as rightful owner and possessor of all, *all that is in heaven and in the earth is thine*, and at thy dispose, by the most disputable right of creation, and as supreme ruler and commander of all; *Thine is the kingdom*, and all kings are thy subjects, for thou art head, and art to be exalted and worshipped, as head above all. (3.) His universal influence and agency. All that are rich and honourable among the children of men, have their riches and honours from God. This acknowledgment he would have the princes take notice of, and join in, that they might not think they had merited any thing of God by their generosity; for from God they had their riches and honour, and what they returned to him was but a small part of what they had received from him. Whoever are great among men, it is God's hand that makes them so; and whatever strength we have, it is God that gives it us, as the *God of Israel our father*, *ver. 10. Psal. lxxvi. 25.*

(2.) He acknowledgeth with thankfulness the grace of God enabling them to contribute so cheerfully towards the building of the temple, *ver. 13, 14. Now therefore our God we thank thee*. Note, The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to him for the honour of being employed in his service, and grace enabling us in any measure to serve him. *Doth he therefore thank that servant?* Luke xvii. 9. No; but that servant has a great deal of reason to thank him. He thanks God that they were able to offer so willingly. Note, (1.) It is a great instance of the power of God's grace in us, to be able to do the work of God willingly; he works both *to will and to do*; and it is in the day of his power that his people are made willing, *Psal. cx. 3.*
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(2.) We must give God all the glory of all the good that is at any time done by ourselves or others. Our own good works must not be the matter of our pride, nor others good works the matter of our flattery, but both the matter of our praise; for certainly it is the greatest honour and pleasure in the world faithfully to serve God.

(3.) He speaks very humbly of himself and his people, and the offerings they had now presented to God.

(1.) For himself and those that joined with him, though they were princes, he admitted that God should take such notice of them, and do so much for them, *ver. 14. Who am I, and what is my people?* David was the most honourable person, and Israel the most honourable people, then in the world; yet thus doth he speak of himself and them, as unworthy the divine cognisance and favour. David now looks very great, presiding in an august assembly, appointing his successor, and making a noble present to the honour of God, and yet little and low in his own eyes: *Who am I, O Lord?* for, *ver. 15. We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, poor despicable creatures; angels in heaven are at home there, saints on earth are but strangers here: Our days on the earth are as a shadow.* David's days had as much of substance in them as most men's; for he was a great man, a good man, a useful man, and now an old man: one that lived long, and lived to good purpose; and yet puts himself not only into the number, but in the front of those who must acknowledge that their *days on the earth are as a shadow*; which speaks our life a vain life, a dark life, a transient life, and a life that will have its period either in perfect light or in perfect darkness. The next words explain it, *there is no abiding*; Heb. no expectation: we cannot expect any great matters from it, nor can we expect any long continuance of it. This is mentioned here, as that which forbids us to boast of the service we do to God; alas! it is confined to a scantling of time, it is the service of a frail and short life, and therefore what can we pretend to merit by it?

(2.) As to their offerings, *Lord, saith he, of thine own have we given thee, ver. 14. and again, ver. 16. It cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.* We have it from thee as a free gift, and therefore are bound to use it for thee; and what we present to thee is but rent or interest from thine own. "In like manner (saith Bishop Patrick) we ought to acknowledge God in "all spiritual things, referring every good thought, good purpose, and "good work, to his grace, from whom we receive it." Let him that glories, therefore, glory in the Lord.

(3.) He appeals to God concerning his own sincerity in what he did, *ver. 17.* It is a great satisfaction to a good man, to think that God tries the heart, and has pleasure in uprightness, that whosoever misinterpret or condemn it, he is acquainted with and approves of the way of the righteous. It was David's comfort, that God knew with what pleasure, he both offered his own and saw the people's offering. He was neither proud of his own good work, nor envious of the good works of others.

(4.) He prays to God both for the people and for Solomon, that both might hold on as they began. In this prayer he addresseth himself to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God in covenant with them, and with us for their sakes: Lord give us grace to make good our part of the covenant, that we may not forfeit the benefit of it. Or thus they were kept in their integrity by the grace of God establishing their way; let the same grace which was sufficient for them, be so for us. 1. For the people he prays, *ver. 18.* that what the good God had put into their minds, he would always keep there, that they might never be worse than they were now; might never lose the convictions they were now under, nor cool in their affections to the house of God; but always have the same thoughts of things they now seemed to have. It is of great consequence to us what is innermost, and what uppermost in the imagination of the thoughts of our heart, what we aim at, and what we love to think of; if any good have got possession of our hearts, or the hearts of our friends, it is good by prayer to commit the custody of it to the grace of God; Lord, keep it there, keep it for ever there. David has prepared materials for the temple, but, Lord, do thou prepare their hearts for such a privilege; establish their hearts, so the margin. Confirm their resolutions; they are in a good mind, keep them so, when I am gone, and theirs for ever. 2. For Solomon he prays, *ver. 19. Give him a perfect heart.* He had charged him, *chap. xxviii. 9.* to serve God with a perfect heart, now here he prays to God to give him such a heart. He does not pray, Lord, make him a rich man, a great man, a learned man: but Lord, make him an honest man; for that is better than all. Lord, give him a perfect heart, not only in general, to keep thy commandments, but in particular, to build the palace, that he may do that service with a single eye. Yet his building the house would not prove him to have a perfect heart, unless he made conscience of keeping God's commandments. It is not helping to build churches that will save us, if we live in disobedience to God's law.

2. The cheerful concurrence of this great assembly in this great solemnity.

1. They joined with David in the adoration of God. When he had done his prayer, he called to them to testify their concurrence (*Now bless the Lord your God, ver. 20.*) which accordingly they did, by bowing down their heads, a gesture of adoration. Whoever is the mouth of the congregation, those only have the benefit who join with him, not by bowing down the head so much as by lifting up the soul.

2. They paid their respects to the king, looking upon him as an instrument in God's hand of much good to them; and in honouring him they honoured God.

3. The next day they offered abundance of sacrifices to God, *ver. 21.* both burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed, and peace-offerings, which the offerer had the greatest part of to himself. Hereby they testified a generous gratitude to God for the good posture their public affairs were in, though David was going off.

4. They feasted and rejoiced before God, *ver. 22.* In token of their joy in God, and communion with him, they feasted upon the peace-offerings, in a religious manner, before the Lord. What had been offered to God they feasted upon; by which was intimated to them, that they should be never the poorer for their late liberal contributions to the service of the temple, they themselves should feast upon the comfort of it.

5. They made Solomon king the second time: he having been before

anointed in haste upon occasion of Adonijah's rebellion, it was thought fit to repeat it for the greater satisfaction of the people. They anointed him to the Lord. Magistrates must look upon themselves as set apart for God, to be his ministers, and must rule accordingly in the fear of God. Zadok also was anointed to be priest, in the room of Abiathar, who had lately forfeited his honour. Happy art thou, O Israel, under such a prince, and such a pontiff.

23. Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered, and all Israel obeyed him. 24. And all the princes and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king. 25. And the LORD magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel. 26. ¶ Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. 27. And the time that he reigned over Israel, was forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. 28. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead. 29. Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer. 30. With all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

These verses bring king Solomon to his throne, and king David to his grave: Thus the rising generation thrusts out that which went before, and saith, Make room for us. Every one has his day.

1. Here is Solomon rising, *ver. 23. Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord.* Not his throne which he had prepared in the heavens, but the throne of Israel is called the throne of the Lord, because he is not only king of all nations, and all kings rule under him, but was in a peculiar manner King of Israel, 1 Sam. xii. 12. he had the founding, he had the filling of their throne by immediate direction; the municipal laws of their kingdom were divine; Urim and prophets were the privy counsellors of their princes, therefore is their throne called the throne of the Lord. Solomon's kingdom typified the kingdom of the Messiah, and his is indeed the throne of the Lord; for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to him: hence he calls him his king, Psal. ii. 6. Being set on the throne of the Lord, the throne to which God called him, he prospered. They that follow the divine conduct, may expect success by the divine blessing. Solomon prospered: for,

(1.) His people paid honour to him, as one to whom honour is due. All Israel obeyed him, i. e. were ready to swear allegiance to him, *ver. 23.* the princes and mighty men, and even the sons of David, though by seniority their title to the crown was prior to his, and they might think themselves wronged by his advancement; yet because God thought fit to make him king, and made him fit to be so, they all submitted themselves to him; God inclined their hearts to do so, that his reign might from the first be peaceable: His father was a better man than he, and yet came to the crown with much difficulty; after long delay, and by many and slow steps: David had more faith, and therefore had it more tried. They submitted themselves, Heb. They gave the hand under Solomon, i. e. bound themselves by oath to be true to him. Putting the hand under the thigh, was a ceremony anciently used in swearing. Or, they were so entirely devoted, that they would put their hand under his feet to serve him.

(2.) God put honour upon him: for those that honour him he will honour: The Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly, *ver. 25.* His very countenance and presence, I am apt to think, had something in them very great and awful: all he said and all he did commanded respect. None of all the Judges or kings of Israel his predecessors, made such a figure as he did, nor lived in such splendor.

2. Here is David's setting; that great man going off the stage. The historian here brings him to the end of his day, leaves him asleep, and draws the curtains about him.

1. He gives a summary account of the years of his reign, *ver. 26, 27.* He reigned forty years, as Moses did, Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, Eli, Samuel and Saul, who were before him, and Solomon after him.

2. He gives a short account of his death, *ver. 28.* that he died full of days, riches, and honour; that is, (1.) Loaded with them; he was very old and very rich, and very much honoured both of God and man. He had been a man of war from his youth, and as such had his soul continually in his hand; yet he was not cut off in the midst of his days, but was preserved through all the dangers of a military life, lived to a good old age, and died, in peace, died in his bed, and yet in the bed of honour. (2.) Satiated with them. He was full of days, riches, and honour, i. e. he had enough of this world, and of the riches and honours of it, and knew when he had enough; for he was very willing to die and leave it, having said, *Psal. xlix. 15. God shall receive me*; and *Psal. xxiii. 5. Thou art with me.* A good man will soon be full of days, riches and honour, but will never be satisfied with them, no satisfaction but in God's loving-kindness.

3. For a fuller account of David's life and reign, he refers his reader to the histories or records of those times, which were written by Samuel while he lived, and continued after his death by Nathan and Gad, *ver. 29.* There was related what was observable in his government at home and his wars abroad, the times, i. e. the events of time that were concerning him, *ver. 29, 30.* These registers were then in being, but are now lost. Note, Good use may be made of those histories of the church which are authentic, though not sacred or of divine inspiration.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

AN
E X P O S I T I O N,
WITH
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,
Upon the SECOND BOOK of
CHRONICLES.

This book begins with the reign of Solomon, and the building of the temple, and thenceforward continues the history of the kings of Judah, to the captivity, and so concludes with the fall of that illustrious monarchy, and the destruction of the temple. That monarchy of the house of David, as it was prior in time, so it was superior in worth and dignity to all those four celebrated ones which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of. The Babylonian monarchy I reckon to begin in Nebuchadnezzar himself, Thou art that head of gold, that lasted but about seventy years. The Persian monarchy in several families, about one hundred and thirty. The Grecians in their several branches about three hundred; and three hundred more went far with the Romans. But as I reckon David a greater hero than any of the founders of those monarchies, and Solomon a more magnificent prince than any of those that were the glories of them, so the succession was kept up in a lineal descent throughout the whole monarchy, which continued considerable between four and five hundred years: and after a long eclipse shone forth again in the kingdom of the Messiah, *of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end.* This history of the Jewish monarchy, as it is more authentic, so it is more entertaining and more instructive than the histories of any of those monarchies. We had the story of the house of David before in the first and second books of *Kings*, intermixed with that of the kings of Israel, which there took up more room than that of Judah, but here we have it entire: much is repeated here which we had before, yet many passages of the story are enlarged upon and divers added, which we had not before, especially relating to the affairs of religion; for it is a church-history, and is written for our learning, to let nations and families know that then, and then only, they can expect to prosper when they keep in the way of their duty to God; for all along the good kings prospered, and the wicked kings suffered. The peaceable reign of Solomon we have *chap. i—ix.* the blenished reign of Rehoboam, *chap. x—xii.* the short but busy reign of Abijah, *chap. xiii.* the long and happy reign of Asa, *chap. xiv—xvi.* the pious and prosperous reign of Jehoshaphat, *chap. xvii—xx.* the impious and infamous reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah, *chap. xxi. xxii.* the unsteady reigns of Joash and Amaziah, *chap. xxiv, xxv.* the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, *chap. xxvi.* the regular reign of Jotham, *chap. xxvii.* the prophane and wicked reign of Ahaz, *chap. xxviii.* the gracious glorious reign of Hezekiah, *chap. xxix—xxxii.* the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon, *chap. xxxiii.* the reforming reign of Josiah, *chap. xxxiv, xxxv.* the ruining reigns of his sons, *chap. xxxvi.* Put all these together, and the truth of that word of God will appear, *Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.* The learned Mr. Whiston, in his Chronology, suggests, that the historical books which were written after the captivity, *viz.* the two books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, have more mistakes in names and numbers than all the books of the Old Testament besides, through the carelessness of transcribers. But though that should be allowed, the things are so very minute, that we may be confident, The foundation of God stands sure notwithstanding.

C H A P I.

In the close of the foregoing book we read how God magnified Solomon, and Israel obeyed him, God and Israel concurred to honour him. Now here we have an account, (1.) How he honoured God by sacrifice, ver. 1—6. and by prayer, ver. 7—12. (2.) How he honoured Israel, by increasing their strength, wealth and trade, ver. 13—17.

1. **A**ND Solomon, the son of David, was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly. 2. Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands, and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers, 3. So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon, for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. 4. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim, to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. 5. Moreover, the brazen altar that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation sought unto it. 6. And Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before the LORD, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it. 7. ¶ In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee. 8. And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead: 9. Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people, like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great? 11. And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: 12. Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee, and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had, that have

been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

Here is, 1. Solomon's great prosperity, *ver. 1.* Though he had a contested title, yet God being with him, he was strengthened in his kingdom, his heart and hands were strengthened, and his interest in the people. God's presence will be our strength.

2. His great piety and devotion. His father was a prophet, a psalmist, and he kept mostly to the ark; but Solomon having read much in his Bible concerning the tabernacle which Moses built, and the altars there, paid more respect to them than it should seem David had done. Both did well, and let neither be censured. If the zeal of one carried him out most to one instance of religion, and of another to the other instance, let them not judge or despise one another.

1. All his great men must thus far be good men, that they must join with him in worshipping God. He spake to the captains and judges, the governors and chief of the fathers to go with him to Gibeon, *ver. 2, 3.* Authority and interest is well bestowed on those that will thus use it for the glory of God, and the promoting of religion. It is duty to engage all that we have influence upon in the solemnities of religion, and very desirable to have many join with us in those solemnities; the more the better, it is the liker to heaven. Solomon began his reign with this public pious visit to God's altar, and it was a very good omen. Magistrates are then likely to do well for themselves and their people, when they thus take God along with them at their setting out.

2. He offered abundance of sacrifices to God there, *ver. 6.* a thousand burnt-offerings, and perhaps a greater number of peace-offerings, on which he and his company feasted before the Lord. Where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly. His father David had left him flocks and herds in abundance, *1 Chron. xxvii. 29—31.* and thus he gave God his dues out of them. The ark was at Jerusalem, *ver. 4.* but the altar was at Gibeon, *ver. 5.* and thither he brought his sacrifices; for it is the altar that sanctifieth every gift.

3. He prayed a good prayer to God: this, with the answer to it we had before, *1 Kings iii. 5, &c.* (1.) God bid him ask what he would, not only that he might put him in the right way of obtaining the favours that were intended him, *Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full;* but that he might try him how he stood affected, and might discover what was in his heart. Men's characters appear in their choices and desires. What wouldst thou have? tries a man as much as, What wouldst thou do? Whether he was one of the children of this world, that say, *Who will shew us any good?* or of the children of light, that say, *Lord lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.* As we choose, we shall have, and that is like to be our portion to which we give the preference, whether the wealth and pleasure of this world, or spiritual riches and delights. (2.) Like a genuine son of David, he chose spiritual blessings rather than temporal. His petition here is, *Give me wisdom and knowledge.* He owns those desirable gifts, and God the giver of them, *Prov. ii. 6.* God gave the faculty of understanding, and to him we must apply ourselves for the furniture of it. Two things are here pleaded which we had not in *Kings*: (1.) *Thou hast made me reign in my father's stead,* *ver. 6.* Lord, thou hast put me into this place, and therefore I can in faith ask of thee grace to enable me to the duty of it. What service we have reason to believe God calls us to, we have reason to hope he will qualify us for. But that is not all; Lord, thou hast put me into this place in the stead of David, that great and good man, that filled it up so well; therefore give me wisdom that Israel may not suffer damage by the change. Must I reign in my father's stead? Lord, give me my father's spirit.

otherwise, we may expect the continuance of God's favour. Let those that are well taught and begin well, take notice of this, if they be constant, they are happy: perseverance wears the crown, though it wins it not.

6. He charges them to adhere steadfastly to God and their duty, *ver. 8.* Observe, (1.) The matter of this charge: *keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God.* The Lord was their God, his commandments must be their rule, they must have respect to them all, must make conscience of keeping them, and in order thereunto must seek for them, *i. e.* must be inquisitive concerning their duty, search the scriptures, take advice, seek the law at their mouth, whose lips were to keep this knowledge, and pray to God to teach and direct them. God's commandments will not be kept without great care. (2.) The solemnity of it: He chargeth them in the sight of all Israel, who would all have notice of this public charge, and in the audience of their God. God is witness, and this congregation is witnesses that they had good counsel given them, and fair warning; if they do not take it, it is their fault, and God and man will be witness against them. See 1 *Tim. v. 21.* 2 *Tim. iv. 1.* Those that profess religion, as they tender the favour of God, and their reputation with men must be faithful to their profession. (3.) The motive to observe this charge; it was the way to be happy, to have the peaceable possession of this good land themselves, and to preserve the entail of it upon their children.

7. He concludes with a charge to Solomon himself, *ver. 9, 10.* He is much concerned that he should be religious. He was to be a great man, but he must not think religion below him; a wise man, and this would be his wisdom. Observe, (1.) The charge he gives him. He must look upon God as the God of his father, his good father, who had devoted him to God, and educated him for God. He was born in God's house, and therefore bound in duty to be his; brought up in his house, and therefore bound in gratitude. *Thine own friend and thy father's friend forsake not.* He must know God and serve him; we cannot serve God aright, if we do not know him; and in vain do we know him, if we do not serve him: Serve him with heart and mind; we make nothing of religion if we do not mind it, and make heart-work of it: Serve him with a perfect, *i. e.* an upright heart; for sincerity is our gospel perfection; and with a willing mind, from a principle of love, and as a willing people, cheerfully and with pleasure. 2. The arguments to enforce this charge: Two arguments of general inducement. (1.) That the secrets of our souls are open before God, he searcheth all hearts, even the hearts of kings, which to men are unsearchable, *Prov. xxv. 3.* We must therefore be sincere, because if we deal deceitfully, God sees it, and cannot be imposed upon; must therefore employ our thoughts, and engage them in God's service, because he fully understands all the imaginations of them, both good and bad. (2.) That we are happy or miserable here and for ever, according as we do or do not serve God; *if we seek him diligently he will be found of us,* and that is enough to make us happy, *Heb. xi. 6.* If we forsake him, desert his service, and turn from following him, he will cast us off for ever, and that is enough to make us miserable. Note, God never cast any off till they have first cast him off. Here is one argument peculiar to Solomon, *ver. 10.* *Thou art to build an house for the sanctuary,* therefore seek and serve God, that that work may be done from a good principle, in right manner, and may be accepted. 3. The means prescribed in order hereunto, and they are prescribed to us all. (1.) Caution; take heed; beware of every thing that looks like, or leads to that which is evil. (2.) Courage; be strong and do it. We cannot do our work as we should, unless we put on resolution, and fetch in strength from divine grace.

11. ¶ Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper chambers thereof, and of the inner parlours thereof, and of the place of the mercy-seat, 12. And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, and of all the chambers round about, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries of the dedicated things. 13. Also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the LORD. 14. He gave of gold by weight, for things of gold, for all instruments of all manner of service, silver also for all instruments of silver, by weight, for all instruments of every kind of service: 15. Even the weight for the candlesticks of gold, and for their lamps of gold, by weight for every candlestick, and for the lamps thereof: and for the candlesticks of silver by weight, both for the candlestick, and also for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candlestick. 16. And by weight he gave gold for the tables of shew-bread, for every table, and likewise silver for the tables of silver; 17. Also pure gold for the flesh hooks, and the bowls, and the cups: and for the golden basons he gave gold by weight for every bason: and likewise silver by weight for every bason of silver: 18. And for the altar of incense, refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 19. All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern. 20. And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee, he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the LORD. 21. And behold, the courses of the priests and the Levites, even they shall be with thee, for all the service of the house of God, and there shall be with thee for all manner of workmanship, every willing skilful man for any manner of service: also the princes and all the people will be wholly at thy commandment.

As for the general charge that David gave his son to seek God and serve him, the book of the law was in that his only rule, and there needed no other: But in building the temple, David was now to give him three things.

1. A model of the building; because it was to be such a building as neither he nor his architects ever saw. Moses had a pattern of the tabernacle shewed him in the mount, *Heb. viii. 5.* so had David of the temple, by the immediate hand of God upon him, *ver. 19.* It was given him in writing, probably by the ministry of an angel, or as clearly and exactly represented to his mind, as if it had been in writing: But it is said, *ver. 12.* "He had this pattern by the spirit." The contrivance either of David's devotion, or of Solomon's wisdom, must not be trusted to in an affair of this nature. The temple must be a sacred thing and a type of Christ, there must be in it not only convenience and decency, but significance; it was a kind of sacrament, and therefore it must not be left to man's art or invention to contrive it; but it must be framed by divine institution. Christ, the true temple, the church, the gospel-temple, and heaven the everlasting temple, are all framed according to the divine councils, and the plan laid in the divine wisdom, ordained before the world for God's glory and ours. This pattern David gave to Solomon, that he might know what to provide, and might go by a certain rule. When Christ left with his disciples a charge to build his gospel-church, he gave them an exact model of it, ordering them to observe that, and that only which he commanded. The particular models are here mentioned; of the porch, which was higher than the rest, like a steeple; then the houses, both the holy place and the most holy, with the rooms adjoining, which were, for treasuries, chambers and parlours, especially the place of the mercy-seat, *ver. 11.* Of the courts likewise, and the chambers about them, in which the dedicated things were laid up. Bishop Patrick supposeth, that among other things, the tabernacle which Moses reared, and all the utensils of it, which there was now no farther occasion for, were laid up here, signifying that in the fulness of time, all the Mosaic economy, all the rites and ceremonies of that dispensation should be decently laid aside, and something better come in their room. He gave him a table of the courses of the priests, patterns of the vessels of service, *ver. 13.* and a pattern of the chariot of the cherubims, *ver. 18.* Besides the two cherubims over the mercy-seat, there were two much larger, whose wings reached from wall to wall, 1 *Kings vi. 23.* &c. and of these, David here gave Solomon the pattern, called a chariot; for the angels are the chariots of God, *Psal. lxxviii. 17.*

2. Materials for the most costly of the utensils of the temple. That they might not be made any less than the patterns, he weighed out stuff enough for each vessel, both of gold and silver, *ver. 14.* In the tabernacle there was but one golden candlestick, in the temple ten, 1 *Kings vii. 49.* besides silver ones, which, it is supposed, were hand-candlesticks, *ver. 15.* In the tabernacle there was but one table; but in the temple, besides that on which the shew-bread was set, there were ten others for other uses, 2 *Chron. iv. 8.* besides silver tables. For this house being much larger than that, it would look bare if it had not furniture proportionable. The gold for the altar of incense, is particularly said to be refined gold, *ver. 18.* purer than any of the rest, for that was typical of the intercession of Christ, than which nothing is more pure and perfect.

3. Directions which way to look for help in this great undertaking. Fear not opposition, fear not the charge, care and trouble, fear not miscarrying in it, as in the case of Uzza, fear not the reproach of the foolish builder, that began to build and was not able to finish. Be not dismayed, (1.) God will help thee, and thou must look upon him in the first place, *ver. 20.* The Lord God, even my God, whom I have chosen and served; who has all along been present with me and prospered me, and to whom, from my own experience of his power and goodness, I recommend thee, he will be with thee, to direct, strengthen, and prosper thee; he will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Note, The God that owned our fathers, and carried them through the service of their day, if we be faithful to him, we may be sure will in like manner go along with us in our day, and will never leave us, while he has any work to do in us or by us. The same that was Joshua's encouragement, *Josh. i. 5.* and Solomon's here, is given to all believers, *Heb. xiii. 5.* He will never leave thee nor forsake thee. God never leaves any, unless they first leave him. (2.) Good men will help thee, *ver. 21.* The priests and Levites will advise thee, and thou mayest consult with them: Thou hast good workmen, that are both willing and skilful, and those are two very great properties in a workman, especially in those that work at the temple: And lastly, the princes and the people will be wholly at thy commandment, every one ready in his place to further it. Then good work is likely to go on, when all parties concerned are hearty in it, and none secretly clog it, but drive on heartily in it.

C H A P. XXIX.

David had said what he had to say to Solomon. But he had something more to say to the congregation before he parts with them.

(1.) He presseth them to contribute according to their ability towards the building and furnishing of the temple, *ver. 1—5.*

(2.) They made their presents accordingly, very generously, *ver. 6—9.*

(3.) David offered up solemn prayers and praises to God upon that occasion, *ver. 10—20.* with sacrifices, *ver. 21.*

(4.) Solomon was hereupon enthroned with great joy and magnificence, *ver. 22—25.*

(5.) David soon after this finished his course, *ver. 26—30.* And it is hard to say which shines brighter here, the setting sun or the rising sun.

1. Furthermore, David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God. 2. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God, the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood: onyx-stones, and stones to be set, glittering stones, and of divers colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance. 3. Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, 4. Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents

lents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses *withal*: 5. The gold for *things* of gold, and the silver for *things* of silver, and for all manner of work *to be made* by the hands of artificers. And who *then* is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? 6. ¶ Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands, and of hundreds, with the rulers over the king's work offering willingly, 7. And gave for the service of the house of God, of gold five thousand talents, and ten thousand drams; and of silver, ten thousand talents; and of brals, eighteen thousand talents; and one hundred thousand talents of iron. 8. And they with whom *precious* stones were found, gave *them* to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. 9. Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

We may here observe.

1. How handsomely David spoke to the great men of Israel, to engage them to contribute towards the building of the temple. It is our duty to provoke one another to love and to good works, not only to do good ourselves, but to draw in others to do good as much as we can. There were many very rich men in Israel, they were all to share in the benefit of the temple, and of those peaceable days which were to befriend the building of it, and therefore, though he would not impose it on them as a tax, what they should give towards it, he would propose it to them, as a fair occasion for a free-will offering; because what is done in works of piety and charity should be done willingly, and not by constraint, for God loves a cheerful giver.

(1.) He would have them consider, that Solomon was young and tender, and needed help, but he was the person whom God had chosen to this work, and therefore was well worthy their assistance. It is good service to encourage those in the work of God, that are as yet young and tender.

(2.) The work was great, and all hands should contribute to the carrying of it on; the palace to be built was not for man, but for the Lord God; and the more was contributed towards the building, the more magnificent it would be, and therefore would the better answer the intention.

(3.) He tells them what great preparations had been made for this work; he did not intend to throw all the burden upon them, nor that it should be built wholly by contributions, but that they should shew their good will, by adding to what was done, *ver. 2. I have prepared with all my might, i. e. I have made it my business: Work for God must be done with all our might, or we shall bring nothing to pass in it.*

(4.) He sets them a good example. Besides what was dedicated to this service out of the spoils and presents of the neighbour nations, which was for the building of the house, of which before, *chap. xxii. 14.* he had out of his own share offered largely, for the beautifying and enriching it, three thousand talents of gold, and seven thousand talents of silver, *ver. 4, 5.* and this because he had set his affection to the house of his God: He gave all this, not as papists build churches in commutation of penance, or to make atonement for sin; not as Pharisees give alms, to be seen of men; but purely because he loved the habitation of God's house, so he professed. *Psal. xxvi. 8.* and here he proved it. Those that set their affection upon the service of God, will think no pains or cost too much to bestow upon it. And then our offerings are pleasing to God, when they come from love. They that set their affections on things above, will let their affection on the house of God, through which our way to heaven lies. Now this he gives the men account of, to stir them up to do likewise. Note, Those who would draw others to that which is good, must lead themselves. Those especially, that are advanced above others in place and dignity, should especially contrive how to make their light shine before men, because the influence of their example is more powerful and more extensive than that of other people.

(5.) He stirs them up to do as he had done, *viz. 5. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?* (1.) We must each of us in our several places serve the Lord, and consecrate our service to him, separate it from other things that are foreign, and interfere with it, and direct and design it for the honour and glory of God. (2.) We must make the service of God our business; must fill our hands to the Lord, so the Hebrew phrase is. They that engage themselves in the service of God will have their hands full, there is work enough for the whole man in that service. The filling of our hands with the service of God, intimates that we must serve him only, serve him liberally, and serve him in the strength of grace derived from him. (3.) We must be free herein, do it willingly and speedily, do it this day when we are in a good mind, Who is willing? Now let him shew it.

2. How handsomely they all contributed towards the building of the temple, when they were thus stirred up to it. Though they were persuaded to it, yet it is said they offered willingly, *ver. 6.* So he saith who knew their hearts. Nay, they offered with a perfect heart, from a good principle, and with a sincere respect to the glory of God, *ver. 9.* How generous they were, appears by the sum total of the contributions, *ver. 7, 8.* They gave like themselves, like princes, like princes of Israel. And a pleasant day's work it was: for, (1.) The people rejoiced; which may be meant of the people themselves that offered; they were glad of the opportunity of honouring God thus with their substance, and glad of the prospect of bringing this good work to perfection. Or the common people rejoiced in the generosity of their princes, that they had such rulers over them who were forward to this good work. Every Israelite is glad to see temple-work carried on with vigour. (2.) David rejoiced with great joy, to see the good effect of his plaims, and other helps of devotion he had furnished them with: rejoiced that his son and successor would have those about him that were so well affected to the house of God, and that this work, which his heart was so much upon, was likely to go on. Note, It is a great reviving to good men, when they are leaving the world, to see those they leave behind zealous for religion, and likely to keep it up. *Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.*

10. ¶ Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever, 11. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all
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that is in the heaven and in the earth, *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12. Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all, and in thine hand *is* power and might, and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. 13. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. 14. But who *am* I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. 15. For we *are* strangers before thee, and sojourners, as *were* all our fathers: our days on the earth *are* as a shadow, and *there is* none abiding. 16. O LORD our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thy holy name, *cometh* of thine hand, and *is* all thine own. 17. I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things; and now have I seen with joy, thy people which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. 18. O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee. 19. And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes, and to do all *these things*, and to build the palace for the which I have made provision. 20. ¶ And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God. And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and worshipped the LORD and the king. 21. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the LORD, and offered burnt-offerings unto the LORD on the morrow after that day, *even* a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, *and* a thousand lambs, with their drink-offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel: 22. And did eat and drink before the LORD on that day with great gladness, and they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed him unto the LORD to be the chief governor, and Zadok to be priest.

We have here,

1. The solemn address which David made to God upon occasion of the noble subscriptions of the princes towards the building of the temple, *ver. 10.* Wherefore David blessed the Lord, not only in his closet; but before all the congregation: This I expected, when we read, *ver. 9.* that David rejoiced with great joy; for such a devout man as he, would, no question, make that the matter of his thanksgiving, which was so much the matter of his rejoicing. He that looked round with comfort, would certainly look up with praise. David was now old, and looked upon himself as near his end, and well becomes aged saints and dying saints, to have their hearts much enlarged in praise and thanksgiving: This will silence their complaints of their bodily infirmities, and help to make the prospect of death itself less. David's plaims, towards the latter end of the book, are most of them plaims of praise. The nearer we come to the world of everlasting praise, the more we should speak the language, and do the work of that world. In this address,

(1.) He adores God, and ascribes glory to him, as the God of Israel, *Blessed for ever and ever.* Our Lord's prayer ends with a doxology much like this which David here begins with, for *thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory.* This is properly praising God with holy awe and reverence, and agreeable affection; acknowledging, 1. His infinite perfections; not only that he is great, powerful, glorious, &c. but that his is the greatness, power, and glory, *i. e.* he has them in and of himself; he is the fountain and centre of every thing that is bright and blessed. All that we can in our most exalted praises attribute to him, he has an unquestionable title to. His is the greatness, his greatness is infinite and incomprehensible, and all others are little, are nothing, in comparison of him. His is the power, and it is almighty and irresistible; power belongs to him, and all the power of all the creatures is derived from him, and depends upon him: His is the glory: for his glory is his own end, and the end of the whole creation: All the glory we can give him with our hearts, lips and lives, comes infinitely short of what is his due. His is the victory; he transcends and surpasseth all, and is able to conquer and subdue all things to himself, and his victories are uncontested, uncontrollable. And his is the majesty, real and personal; with him is terrible majesty, inexpressible and inconceivable. (2.) His sovereign dominion; as rightful owner and possessor of all, *all that is in heaven and in the earth is thine*, and at thy disposal, by the indisputable right of creation, and as supreme ruler and commander of all; *Thine is the kingdom*, and all kings are thy subjects, for thou art head, and art to be exalted and worshipped, as head above all. (3.) His universal influence and agency. All that are rich and honourable among the children of men, have their riches and honours from God. This acknowledgment he would have the princes take notice of, and join in, that they might not think they had merited any thing of God by their generosity; for from God they had their riches and honour, and what they returned to him was but a small part of what they had received from him. Whoever are great among men, it is God's hand that makes them so; and whatever strength we have, it is God that gives it us, as the God of Israel our father, *ver. 10. Psal. lxxvi. 25.*

(2.) He acknowledgeth with thankfulness the grace of God enabling them to contribute so cheerfully towards the building of the temple, *ver. 13, 14.* Now therefore our God we thank thee. Note, The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to him for the honour of being employed in his service, and grace enabling us in any measure to serve him. *Dost he therefore thank that servant?* Luke xvii. 9. No; but that servant has a great deal of reason to thank him. He thanks God that they were able to offer so willingly. Note, (1.) It is a great instance of the power of God's grace in us, to be able to do the work of God willingly; he works both to will and to do; and it is in the day of his power that his people are made willing, *Psal. cx. 3.*
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(2.) We

(2.) We must give God all the glory of all the good that is at any time done by ourselves or others. Our own good works must not be the matter of our pride, nor others good works the matter of our flattery, but both the matter of our praise; for certainly it is the greatest honour and pleasure in the world faithfully to serve God.

(3.) He speaks very humbly of himself and his people, and the offerings they had now presented to God.

(1.) For himself and those that joined with him, though they were princes, he admitted that God should take such notice of them, and do so much for them, *ver. 14. Who am I, and what is my people?* David was the most honourable person, and Israel the most honourable people, then in the world; yet thus doth he speak of himself and them, as unworthy the divine cognisance and favour. David now looks very great, presiding in an august assembly, appointing his successor, and making a noble present to the honour of God, and yet little and low in his own eyes: *Who am I, O Lord?* for, *ver. 15. We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, poor despicable creatures; angels in heaven are at home there, saints on earth are but strangers here: Our days on the earth are as a shadow.* David's days had as much of substance in them as most men's; for he was a great man, a good man, a useful man, and now an old man: one that lived long, and lived to good purpose; and yet puts himself not only into the number, but in the front of those who must acknowledge that their *days on the earth are as a shadow*; which speaks our life a vain life, a dark life, a transient life, and a life that will have its period either in perfect light or in perfect darkness. The next words explain it, *there is no abiding*; Heb. no expectation: we cannot expect any great matters from it, nor can we expect any long continuance of it. This is mentioned here, as that which forbids us to boast of the service we do to God; alas! it is confined to a scantling of time, it is the service of a frail and short life, and therefore what can we pretend to merit by it?

(2.) As to their offerings, Lord, saith he, *of thine own have we given thee*, *ver. 14. and again, ver. 16. It cometh of thine hand, and is all thine own.* We have it from thee as a free gift, and therefore are bound to use it for thee; and what we present to thee is but rent or interest from thine own. "In like manner (saith Bishop Patrick) we ought to acknowledge God in all spiritual things, referring every good thought, good purpose, and good work, to his grace, from whom we receive it." Let him that glories, therefore, glory in the Lord.

(3.) He appeals to God concerning his own sincerity in what he did, *ver. 17.* It is a great satisfaction to a good man, to think that God *tries the heart*, and *has pleasure in uprightness*, that whosoever misinterpret or condemn it, he is acquainted with and approves of the way of the righteous. It was David's comfort, that God knew with what pleasure, he both offered his own and saw the people's offering. He was neither proud of his own good work, nor envious of the good works of others.

(4.) He prays to God both for the people and for Solomon, that both might hold on as they began. In this prayer he addresseth himself to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God in covenant with them, and with us for their sakes: Lord give us grace to make good our part of the covenant, that we may not forfeit the benefit of it. Or thus they were kept in their integrity by the grace of God establishing their way; let the same grace which was sufficient for them, be so for us. 1. For the people he prays, *ver. 18.* that what the good God had put into their minds, he would always keep there, that they might never be worse than they were now; might never lose the convictions they were now under, nor cool in their affections to the house of God; but always have the same thoughts of things they now seemed to have. It is of great consequence to us what is innermost, and what uppermost in the imagination of the thoughts of our heart, what we aim at, and what we love to think of: if any good have got possession of our hearts, or the hearts of our friends, it is good by prayer to commit the custody of it to the grace of God; Lord, keep it there, keep it for ever there. David has prepared materials for the temple, but, Lord, do thou prepare their hearts for such a privilege; *establish their hearts*, so the margin. Confirm their resolutions; they are in a good mind, keep them so, when I am gone, them and theirs for ever. 2. For Solomon he prays, *ver. 19. Give him a perfect heart.* He had charged him, *chap. xxviii. 9.* to serve God with a perfect heart, now here he prays to God to give him such a heart. He does not pray, Lord, make him a rich man, a great man, a learned man: but Lord, make him an honest man; for that is better than all. Lord, *give him a perfect heart*, not only in general, to keep thy commandments, but in particular, to build the palace, that he may do that service with a single eye. Yet his building the house would not prove him to have a perfect heart, unless he made conscience of keeping God's commandments. It is not helping to build churches that will save us, if we live in disobedience to God's law.

2. The cheerful concurrence of this great assembly in this great solemnity.

1. They joined with David in the adoration of God. When he had done his prayer, he called to them to testify their concurrence (*Now bless the Lord your God*, *ver. 20.*) which accordingly they did, by bowing down their heads, a gesture of adoration. Whoever is the mouth of the congregation, those only have the benefit who join with him, not by bowing down the head so much as by lifting up the soul.

2. They paid their respects to the king, looking upon him as an instrument in God's hand of much good to them; and in honouring him they honoured God.

3. The next day they offered abundance of sacrifices to God, *ver. 21.* both burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed, and peace-offerings, which the offerer had the greatest part of to himself. Hereby they testified a generous gratitude to God for the good posture their public affairs were in, though David was going off.

4. They feasted and rejoiced before God, *ver. 22.* In token of their joy in God, and communion with him, they feasted upon the peace-offerings, in a religious manner, before the Lord. What had been offered to God they feasted upon; by which was intimated to them, that they should be never the poorer for their late liberal contributions to the service of the temple, they themselves should feast upon the comfort of it.

5. They made Solomon king the second time: he having been before

anointed in haste upon occasion of Adonijah's rebellion, it was thought fit to repeat it for the greater satisfaction of the people. They anointed him to the Lord. Magistrates must look upon themselves as set apart for God, to be his ministers, and must rule accordingly in the fear of God. Zadok also was anointed to be priest, in the room of Abiathar, who had lately forfeited his honour. Happy art thou, O Israel, under such a prince, and such a pontiff.

23. Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered, and all Israel obeyed him. 24. And all the princes and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of king David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king. 25. And the LORD magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel. 26. ¶ Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. 27. And the time that he reigned over Israel, was forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. 28. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead. 29. Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Gad the seer. 30. With all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

These verses bring king Solomon to his throne, and king David to his grave: Thus the rising generation thrusts out that which went before, and saith, Make room for us. Every one has his day.

1. Here is Solomon rising, *ver. 23. Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord.* Not his throne which he had prepared in the heavens, but the throne of Israel is called *the throne of the Lord*, because he is not only king of all nations, and all kings rule under him, but was in a peculiar manner King of Israel, 1 Sam. xii. 12. he had the founding, he had the filling of their throne by immediate direction; the municipal laws of their kingdom were divine; Urim and prophets were the privy counsellors of their princes, therefore is their throne called *the throne of the Lord*. Solomon's kingdom typified the kingdom of the Messiah, and his is indeed *the throne of the Lord*; for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to him: hence he calls him *his king*, Psal. ii. 6. Being set on the *throne of the Lord*, the throne to which God called him, he prospered. They that follow the divine conduct, may expect success by the divine blessing. Solomon prospered: for,

(1.) His people paid honour to him, as one to whom honour is due. All Israel obeyed him, i. e. were ready to swear allegiance to him, *ver. 23.* the princes and mighty men, and even the sons of David, though by seniority their title to the crown was prior to his, and they might think themselves wronged by his advancement; yet because God thought fit to make him king, and made him fit to be so, they all submitted themselves to him; God inclined their hearts to do so, that his reign might from the first be peaceable. His father was a better man than he, and yet came to the crown with much difficulty; after long delay, and by many and slow steps: David had more faith, and therefore had it more tried. They submitted themselves, Heb. *They gave the hand under Solomon*, i. e. bound themselves by oath to be true to him. Putting the hand under the thigh, was a ceremony anciently used in swearing. Or, they were so entirely devoted, that they would put their hand under his feet to serve him.

(2.) God put honour upon him: for those that honour him he will honour: *The Lord magnified Solomon exceedingly*, *ver. 25.* His very countenance and presence, I am apt to think, had something in them very great and awful: all he said and all he did commanded respect. None of all the Judges or kings of Israel his predecessors, made such a figure as he did, nor lived in such splendor.

2. Here is David's setting; that great man going off the stage. The historian here brings him to the end of his day, leaves him asleep, and draws the curtains about him.

1. He gives a summary account of the years of his reign, *ver. 26, 27.* He reigned forty years, as Moses did, Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, Eli, Samuel and Saul, who were before him, and Solomon after him.

2. He gives a short account of his death, *ver. 28.* that he died full of days, riches, and honour; that is, (1.) Loaded with them; he was very old and very rich, and very much honoured both of God and man. He had been a man of war from his youth, and as such had his soul continually in his hand; yet he was not cut off in the midst of his days, but was preserved through all the dangers of a military life, lived to a good old age, and died, in peace, died in his bed, and yet in the bed of honour. (2.) Satiated with them. He was full of days, riches, and honour, i. e. he had enough of this world, and of the riches and honours of it, and knew when he had enough; for he was very willing to die and leave it, having said, *Psal. xlix. 15. God shall receive me*; and *Psal. xxiii. 5. Thou art with me*. A good man will soon be full of days, riches and honour, but will never be satisfied with them, no satisfaction but in God's loving-kindness.

3. For a fuller account of David's life and reign, he refers his reader to the histories or records of those times, which were written by Samuel while he lived, and continued after his death by Nathan and Gad, *ver. 29.* There was related what was observable in his government at home and his wars abroad, the times, i. e. the events of time that were concerning him, *ver. 29, 30.* These registers were then in being, but are now lost. Note, Good use may be made of those histories of the church which are authentic, though not sacred or of divine inspiration.

THE END OF THE FIRST BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

AN EXPOSITION,

WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

Upon the SECOND BOOK of

CHRONICLES.

This book begins with the reign of Solomon, and the building of the temple, and thenceforward continues the history of the kings of Judah, to the captivity, and so concludes with the fall of that illustrious monarchy, and the destruction of the temple. That monarchy of the house of David, as it was prior in time, so it was superior in worth and dignity to all those four celebrated ones which Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of. The Babylonian monarchy I reckon to begin in Nebuchadnezzar himself, Thou art that head of gold, that lasted but about seventy years. The Persian monarchy in several families, about one hundred and thirty. The Grecians in their several branches about three hundred; and three hundred more went far with the Romans. But as I reckon David a greater hero than any of the founders of those monarchies, and Solomon a more magnificent prince than any of those that were the glories of them, so the succession was kept up in a lineal descent throughout the whole monarchy, which continued considerable between four and five hundred years: and after a long eclipse shone forth again in the kingdom of the Messiah, *of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end.* This history of the Jewish monarchy, as it is more authentic, so it is more entertaining and more instructive than the histories of any of those monarchies. We had the story of the house of David before in the first and second books of *Kings*, intermixed with that of the kings of Israel, which there took up more room than that of Judah, but here we have it entire: much is repeated here which we had before, yet many passages of the story are enlarged upon and divers added, which we had not before, especially relating to the affairs of religion; for it is a church-history, and is written for our learning, to let nations and families know that then, and then only, they can expect to prosper when they keep in the way of their duty to God; for all along the good kings prospered, and the wicked kings suffered. The peaceable reign of Solomon we have *chap. i—ix.* the blemished reign of Rehoboam, *chap. x—xii.* the short but busy reign of Abijah, *chap. xiii.* the long and happy reign of Asa, *chap. xiv—xvi.* the pious and prosperous reign of Jehoshaphat, *chap. xvii—xx.* the impious and infamous reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah, *chap. xxi. xxii.* the unsteady reigns of Joash and Amaziah, *chap. xxiv. xxv.* the long and prosperous reign of Uzziah, *chap. xxvi.* the regular reign of Jotham, *chap. xxvii.* the prophane and wicked reign of Ahaz, *chap. xxviii.* the gracious glorious reign of Hezekiah, *chap. xxix—xxxii.* the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon, *chap. xxxiii.* the reforming reign of Josiah, *chap. xxxiv. xxxv.* the ruining reigns of his sons, *chap. xxxvi.* Put all these together, and the truth of that word of God will appear, *Them that honour me I will honour, but they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.* The learned Mr. Whiston, in his Chronology, suggests, that the historical books which were written after the captivity, *viz.* the two books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, have more mistakes in names and numbers than all the books of the Old Testament besides, through the carelessness of transcribers. But though that should be allowed, the things are so very minute, that we may be confident, The foundation of God stands sure notwithstanding.

CHAPTER I.

In the close of the foregoing book we read how God magnified Solomon, and Israel obeyed him, God and Israel concurred to honour him. Now here we have an account, (1.) How he honoured God by sacrifice, ver. 1—6. and by prayer, ver. 7—12. (2.) How he honoured Israel, by increasing their strength, wealth and trade, ver. 13—17.

1. **A**ND Solomon, the son of David, was strengthened in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly. 2. Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands, and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers, 3. So Solomon, and all the congregation with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon, for there was the tabernacle of the congregation of God, which Moses the servant of the LORD had made in the wilderness. 4. But the ark of God had David brought up from Kirjath-jearim, to the place which David had prepared for it: for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. 5. Moreover, the brazen altar that Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put before the tabernacle of the LORD: and Solomon and the congregation fought unto it. 6. And Solomon went up thither to the brazen altar before the LORD, which was at the tabernacle of the congregation, and offered a thousand burnt offerings upon it. 7. ¶ In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee. 8. And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead: 9. Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people, like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10. Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great? 11. And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: 12. Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee, and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had, that have

been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

Here is, 1. Solomon's great prosperity, *ver. 1.* Though he had a contested title, yet God being with him, he was strengthened in his kingdom, his heart and hands were strengthened, and his interest in the people. God's preference will be our strength.

2. His great piety and devotion. His father was a prophet, a psalmist, and he kept mostly to the ark; but Solomon having read much in his Bible concerning the tabernacle which Moses built, and the altars there, paid more respect to them than it should seem David had done. Both did well, and let neither be censured. If the zeal of one carried him out most to one instance of religion, and of another to the other instance, let them not judge or despise one another.

1. All his great men must thus far be good men, that they must join with him in worshipping God. He spake to the captains and judges, the governors and chief of the fathers to go with him to Gibeon, *ver. 2, 3.* Authority and interest is well bestowed on those that will thus use it for the glory of God, and the promoting of religion. It is duty to engage all that we have influence upon in the solemnities of religion, and very desirable to have many join with us in those solemnities; the more the better, it is the liker to heaven. Solomon began his reign with this public pious visit to God's altar, and it was a very good omen. Magistrates are then likely to do well for themselves and their people, when they thus take God along with them at their setting out.

2. He offered abundance of sacrifices to God there, *ver. 6.* a thousand burnt-offerings, and perhaps a greater number of peace-offerings, on which he and his company feasted before the Lord. Where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly. His father David had left him flocks and herds in abundance, *1 Chron. xxvii. 29—31.* and thus he gave God his dues out of them. The ark was at Jerusalem, *ver. 4.* but the altar was at Gibeon, *ver. 5.* and thither he brought his sacrifices; for it is the altar that sanctifieth every gift.

3. He prayed a good prayer to God: this, with the answer to it we had before, *1 Kings iii. 5.* &c. (1.) God bid him ask what he would, not only that he might put him in the right way of obtaining the favours that were intended him, *Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full;* but that he might try him how he stood affected, and might discover what was in his heart. Men's characters appear in their choices and desires. What wouldst thou have? tries a man as much as, What wouldst thou do? Whether he was one of the children of this world, that say, *Who will shew us any good?* or of the children of light, that say, *Lord lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.* As we choose, we shall have, and that is like to be our portion to which we give the preference, whether the wealth and pleasure of this world, or spiritual riches and delights. (2.) Like a genuine son of David, he chose spiritual blessings rather than temporal. His petition here is, *Give me wisdom and knowledge.* He owns those desirable gifts, and God the giver of them, *Prov. ii. 6.* God gave the faculty of understanding, and to him we must apply ourselves for the furniture of it. Two things are here pleaded which we had not in *Kings*: (1.) *Thou hast made me reign in my father's stead,* *ver. 6.* Lord, thou hast put me into this place, and therefore I can in faith ask of thee grace to enable me to the duty of it. What service we have reason to believe God calls us to, we have reason to hope he will qualify us for. But that is not all; Lord, thou hast put me into this place, in the stead of David, that great and good man, that filled it up so well; therefore give me wisdom that Israel may not suffer damage by the change. Must I reign in my father's stead? Lord, give me my father's spirit.

spirit. Note, The eminency of those that went before us, and the obligation that lies upon us to keep up and carry on the good work they were engaged in, should provoke us to a gracious emulation, and quicken our prayers to God for wisdom and grace, that we may do the work of God in our day, as faithfully and well as they did it in theirs. (2.) *Let thy promise to David my father be established*, ver. 9. He means the promise concerning his successor. In performance of that promise, *Lord, give me wisdom*: We do not find that wisdom was any of the things promised, but it was necessary in order to the accomplishment of what was promised, 2 Sam. vii. 13, 14. The promise was, *He shall build a house for my name, I will establish his throne, he shall be my son, and my mercy shall not depart from him*. Now, Lord, unless thou give me wisdom, thy house will not be built, nor my throne established; I shall carry it unbecoming my relation to thee as a Father, shall forfeit my mercy and fool it away; therefore, *Lord, give me wisdom*. Note, 1. God's promises are our best pleas in prayer; *Remember thy word unto thy servant*. (2.) Children may take the comfort of the promises of that covenant which their parents in their baptism laid claim to, and took hold of for them. 3. The best way to obtain the benefit of the promises and privileges of the covenant, is to be earnest in prayer with God for wisdom and grace to do the duties of it.

4. He received a gracious answer to this prayer, ver. 11, 12. (1.) God gave him the wisdom that he asked for, because he asked for it: wisdom is a gift that God gives as freely and liberally as any gift, to those that value it, and wrestle for it, and will resolve to make use of it; and he upbraideth not the poor petitioners, with their folly, James i. 5. God's grace shall never be wanting to those who sincerely desire to know and do their duty. (2.) God gave him the wealth and honour which he did not ask for, because he asked not for it. Those that pursue present things most earnestly, are most likely to miss of them; while those that refer themselves to the providence of God, if they have not the most of those things, have the comfort in them. Those that make this world their end, come short of the other, and are disappointed in this too; but those that make the other world their end, shall not only obtain that, and full satisfaction in it, but shall take as much as is convenient of this world in their way.

13. ¶ Then Solomon came from his journey, to the high place that was at Gibeon, to Jerusalem, from before the tabernacle of the congregation, and reigned over Israel. 14. And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, which he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. 15. And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar-trees made he as the ficomore-trees that are in the vale for abundance. 16. And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the kings merchants received the linen yarn at a price. 17. And they fetched up, and brought fourth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so brought they out horses for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means.

Here is, 1. Solomon's entrance upon the government, ver. 13. he came from before the tabernacle and reigned over Israel: He would not do any acts of government till he had done his acts of devotion; would not take honour to himself till he had given honour to God; first the tabernacle, and then the throne. But when he had obtained wisdom from God, he did not bury his talent, but as he had received the gift, ministered the same, did not give up himself to ease and pleasure, but minded business; he reigned over Israel.

2. The magnificence of his court, ver. 14. he gathered chariots and horsemen. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not: for the king was forbid to multiply horses, Deut. xvii. 16. I do not remember that ever we find his good father in a chariot, or on horse-back; a mule was the highest he mounted. We should rather affect to excel those that went before us in goodness than in grandeur.

3. The wealth and trade of his kingdom. He made silver and gold very cheap and common, ver. 15. The increase of gold lowers the value of it; but the increase of grace advanceth its price, the more men have of that the more they value it; how much better therefore is it to get wisdom than gold? He opened also a trade with Egypt, whence he imported horses and linen-yarn, which he exported again to the kings of Syria, with great advantage, no doubt, ver. 16, 17. This we had before, 1 Kings x. 28, 29. It is the wisdom of princes to promote industry, and encourage trade in their dominions. Perhaps Solomon took the hint of setting up the linen manufacture, bringing linen-yarn into Egypt, working it into cloth, and then sending that to other nations, from what his mother taught him among the characters of the virtuous women, Prov. xxxi. 24. That she maketh fine linen and selleth it, and delivereth girdles of it to the merchant. In all labour there is profit.

CHAP. II.

Solomon's trading, which we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter, and the encouragement he gave both to merchandize and manufactures was very commendable. But building was the work he was designed for, and to that business he is here applying himself. Here is, (1.) Solomon's determination to build the temple and a royal palace, and his appointing labourers to be employed herein, ver. 1, 2—17, 18. (2.) His request to Hiram king of Tyre, to furnish him both with artists and materials, ver. 3—10. (3.) Hiram's obliging answer to, and compliance with his requests, ver. 11—16.

1. **A**ND Solomon determined to build an house for the name of the LORD, and an house for his kingdom. 2. And Solomon told out threescore and ten thousand men to bear burdens, and fourscore thousand to hew in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred to oversee them. 3. ¶ And Solomon sent to Hiram the king of Tyre, saying, As thou didst deal with David my father, and didst send him cedars

to build him an house to dwell therein, *even so deal with me*. 4. Behold, I build an house to the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shew-bread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new-moons, and on the solemn feasts of the LORD our God. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel. 5. And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods. 6. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him? 7. Send me now therefore a man, cunning to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in iron, and in purple, and in crimson, and blue, and that can skill to grave with the cunning men that are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father did provide. 8. Send me also cedar-trees, fir-trees, and algum-trees, out of Lebanon (for I know that thy servants can skill to cut timber in Lebanon) and behold, my servants shall be with thy servants. 9. Even to prepare me timber in abundance: for the house which I am about to build, shall be wonderful great. 10. And behold, I will give to thy servants, the hewers that cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.

Solomon's wisdom was given him, not merely for speculation to entertain himself, (though it is indeed a princely entertainment) nor merely for conversation to entertain his friends, but for action, and therefore to action he presently applies himself. Observe,

1. His resolution within himself concerning his business, ver. 1. He determined to build, in the first place, a house for the name of the Lord. It is fit he that is the first, should be first served; first a temple, and then a palace; a house not so much for himself and his own convenience and magnificence, as for the kingdom, for the honour of it among its neighbours, and for the decent reception of the people whenever they had occasion to apply themselves to their prince; so that in both, he aimed at the public good. Those are the wisest men that lay out themselves most for the honour of the name of the Lord, and the welfare of communities; we are not born for ourselves, but for God and our country.

2. His embassy to Hiram, king of Tyre, to engage his assistance in the prosecution of his designs. The purport of his errand to him, is much the same here as we had it, 1 Kings v. 8. only here it is more largely set forth.

1. The reasons why he makes this application to Hiram, are here more fully represented, for information to Hiram, as well as for inducement.

(1.) He pleads his father's interest in Hiram, and the kindness he had received from him, ver. 3. *As thou didst deal with David, so deal with me*. As we must shew kindness to, so we may expect kindness from our fathers' friends, and with them should cultivate a correspondence.

(2.) He represents his design in building the temple: He intended it for a place of religious worship, ver. 4. that all the offerings which God had appointed for the honour of his name, might be offered up there. The house was built, that it might be dedicated to God and used in his service; this we should aim at in all our business, that our havings and doings may be all to the glory of God. He mentions divers particular services that were here to be performed for the instruction of Hiram. The mysteries of the true religion, unlike those of the Gentile superstition, covered not concealment.

(3.) He endeavours to possess Hiram with very great and high thoughts of the God of Israel, by expressing the mighty veneration he had for his holy name. *Great is our God above all gods*, above all idols, above all princes, idols are nothing, princes are little, and both under the control of the God of Israel; and therefore, 1. The house must be great, not in proportion to the greatness of that God to whom it is to be dedicated, for between finite and infinite there can be no proportion, but in some proportion to the great value and esteem we have for this God. 2. Yet, be it never so great, it cannot be a habitation for the great God: Let not Hiram think that the God of Israel, like the gods of the nations, dwelt in temples made with hands, Acts xvii. 24. no, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. It is intended only for the convenience of his priests and worshippers, that they may have a fitting place wherein to burn sacrifices before him. 2. He looked upon himself, though a mighty prince, as unworthy the honour of being employed in this great work. *Who am I, that I should build him a house?* It becomes us to go about every work for God, with a due sense of our utter insufficiency for it, and our incapacity to do any thing adequate to the divine perfections. It is part of the wisdom, wherein we ought to walk towards them that are without, carefully to guard against all misapprehensions, which any thing we say or do may occasion, concerning God; so Solomon doth here in his treaty with Hiram.

2. The requests he makes to him are more particularly set down here.

1. He desires Hiram would furnish him with a good hand to work, ver. 7. *Send me a man*. He had cunning men with him in Jerusalem and Judah, whom David provided, 1 Chron. xxii. 15. Let them not think but that the Jews had some among them that were artists, but *send me a man* to direct them. There are ingenious men in Jerusalem, but not such engravers as are in Tyre, and therefore since temple-work must be the best in its kind, let me have the best workman that can be got. 2. With good stuff to work on, ver. 8. Cedar, and other timber in abundance, ver. 8, 9. for the house must be wonderful great, i. e. very stately and magnificent, no cost must be spared, nor any contrivance wanting in it.

3. Here is Solomon's engagement to maintain the workmen, ver. 10. to give them so much wheat and barley, so much wine and oil; he did not feed his workmen with bread and water, but with plenty, and every thing of the best. They that employ labourers ought to take care they be not only well paid, but well provided for, with sufficient of that which is wholesome and fitting for them. Let the rich masters do for their poor workmen, as they would be done by if the tables were turned.

11. ¶ Then Hiram the king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon, Because the LORD hath loved his people, he hath made thee king

king over them. 12. Hiram said moreover, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, that made heaven and earth, who hath given to David the king a wise son, endued with prudence and understanding, that might build an house for the LORD, and an house for his kingdom. 13. And now I have sent a cunning man (endued with understanding) of Hiram my fathers: 14. The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skilful to work in gold and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson: also to grave any manner of graving, and to find out every device which shall be put to him, with thy cunning men, and with the cunning men of my lord David thy father. 15. Now therefore the wheat and the barley, the oil, and the wine which my lord hath spoken of, let him send unto his servants: 16. And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need, and we will bring it to thee in floats, by sea to Joppa, and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem. 17. ¶ And Solomon numbered all the strangers that were in the land of Israel, after the numbering wherewith David his father had numbered them; and they were found an hundred and fifty thousand and three thousand and six hundred. 18. And he set threescore and ten thousand of them to be bearers of burdens, and fourscore thousand to be hewers in the mountain, and three thousand and six hundred overseers to let the people a-work.

Here is the return which Hiram made to Solomon's embassy, in which he shows a great respect for Solomon, and a readiness to serve him. Lesser people may learn of these great ones to be neighbourly and complaisant.

1. He congratulates the happiness of Israel, in having such a king as Solomon was, ver. 11. *Because the Lord loved his people, he has made thee king.* Note. A wise and good government is a great blessing to any people, and may well be accounted a singular token of God's favour. He doth not say, *Because he loved thee* (though that was true, 2 Sam. xii. 24.) he made thee king, but because he loved his people; princes must look upon themselves as preferred for the public good, not for their own personal satisfaction, and should rule so as to let them be given in love and not in anger.

2. He blesteth God for raising up such a successor to David, ver. 12. It should seem, Hiram was not only very well affected to the Jewish nation, and well pleased with their prosperity, but that he was profelyted to the Jewish religion, and worshipped Jehozah the God of Israel (who was now known by that name to the neighbouring nations) as the God that made heaven and earth, and the fountain of power as well as being, for he lets up kings. Now the people of Israel kept close to the law and worship of God, and so preserved their honour, the neighbour-nations were as willing to be instructed by them in their true religion, as they had been in the days of their apostasy to be infected with the idolatries and superstitions of their neighbours. This made them high, that they lent to many nations and did not borrow, lent truth to them, and did not borrow error from them; as when they did contrary, it was their shame.

3. He sent him a very ingenious curious workman, that would not fail to answer his expectations in every thing. One that had both Jewish and Gentile blood meeting in him, for his mother was an Israelite, (Hiram thought she was of the tribe of Dan, and therefore said so here, ver. 14. but it seems she was of the tribe of Naphtali, 1 Kings vii. 14.) but his father was a Tyrian: a good omen of uniting Jew and Gentile in the gospel-temple, as it was likewise that the building of the second temple was greatly furthered by Darius (Ezra vi.) who is supposed to be the son of Eslier, an Israelite by the mother's side.

4. He engaged for the timber, as much as he would have occasion for, and undertook to deliver it at Joppa; and withal signified his dependance upon Solomon for the maintenance of the workmen, as he had promised, ver. 15, 16. This agreement we had, 1 Kings v. 8, 9.

2. The orders which Solomon gave about the workmen. He would not employ the free-born Israelites in the drudgery-work of the temple itself, not so much as to be overlaid with it, but in this he employed the strangers that were profelyted to the Jewish religion, who had not lands of inheritance in Canaan, as the Israelites had, and therefore applied themselves to trades, and got their living by their ingenuity and industry: a vast number of these there was at this time, (ver. 17.) who, if they were of any of the devoted nations, it is probable falling within the curse, fell under the law of the Gibeonites, to be hewers of wood for the congregation: If not, yet being in many cases well provided for by the laws of Moses, and put upon an equal foot with the native Israelites, they were bound in gratitude to do what they could for the service of the temple; yet, no doubt, they were well paid, in money or money's worth; the law was, *Thou shalt not oppress a stranger.* The distribution of them we have here, ver. 2. and again, ver. 18. One hundred and fifty thousand in all. Canaan was a fruitful land that found meat for so many mouths more than the numerous natives; and the temple a vast building that found work for so many hands. But Mr. Fuller thinks, that religious criticism, peculiar to this structure, of framing all beforehand, must needs increase the work; I think, it rather left so much the more room for this vast multitude of hands to be employed in it: for in the forest of Lebanon they might all be at work together without crowding one another, which they could not have been upon mount Sion. And if there had not been such vast numbers employed, so large and curious a fabric, which was begun and ended in seven years, might, for ought I know, have been as long in building as St. Paul's.

C H A P. III.

It was a much larger and more particular account of the building of the temple which we had in the book of Kings, than is here in this book of Chronicles. In this chapter we have, (1.) The place and time of building the temple, ver. 1, 2. (2.) The dimensions and rich ornaments of it, ver. 3—9. (3.) The cherubims in the most holy place, ver. 10—13. (4.) The veil, ver. 14. (5.) The two

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pillars, ver. 15—17. Of all which we have already had an account. 1 Kings vi.

1. THEN Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 2. And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign. 3. ¶ Now these are the things wherein Solomon was instructed for the building of the house of God. The length by cubits after the first measure was threescore cubits, and the breadth twenty cubits. 4. And the porch that was in the front of the house, the length of it was according to the breadth of the house twenty cubits, and the height was an hundred and twenty: and he overlaid it with pure gold. 5. And the greater house he cycled with fir-tree, which he overlaid with fine gold, and set thereon palm-trees and chains. 6. And he garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim. 7. He overlaid also the house, the beams, the posts, and the walls thereof, and the doors thereof with gold, and graven cherubims on the walls. 8. And he made the most holy house, the length whereof was according to the breadth of the house, twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits: and he overlaid it with fine gold amounting to six hundred talents. 9. And the weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold: and he overlaid the upper chamber with gold.

Here is, 1. The place where the temple was built. Solomon was neither at liberty to choose, nor at a loss to fix the place; it was before determined, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. which was an ease to his mind. (1.) It must be at Jerusalem, for that was the place where God had chosen to put his name there: the royal city must be the holy city; there must be testimony of Israel, for here are set the thrones of judgment, Psal. cxxii. 4, 5. (2.) It must be in mount Moriah, which some think was that very place in which and of Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac, Gen. xxii. 2. So that Hiram saith expressly, adding, *But he was delivered by the word of the Lord, and a ram provided in his place.* That was typical of Christ's sacrifice of himself; therefore fitly was the temple there built, which was likewise a type of him. (3.) It must be where the Lord appeared to David, and answered him by fire, 1 Chron. xxi. 18—26. There atonement was made once, and therefore in remembrance of that, there atonement must it be made. There where God has met with me, it is to be hoped he will be still. (4.) It must be in the place that David had prepared, not only which he had purchased with his money, but which he had pitched upon by divine direction. It was Solomon's wisdom not to inquire out a more convenient place, but acquiesce in the appointment of God, whatever might be objected against it. (5.) It must be in the threshing-floor of Ornan, which, if (as a Jebusite) it gives encouragement to the Gentiles, yet it obligeth us to look upon temple work, as that which requires the labour of the mind, no less than threshing work doth that of the body.

1. The time when it was begun; not till the fourth year of Solomon's reign, ver. 2. not that the three first years were trifled away, or spent in deliberating whether they should build the temple or no, but they were employed in the necessary preparations for it, wherein three years would be soon gone, considering how many hands were to be got together and set to work. Some conjecture that this year was a sabbatical year, or year of release and rest to the land, when the people being discharged from their husbandry, might more easily lend a hand to the beginning of this work, and then the year it was finished would fall out to be another sabbatical year, when they would likewise have leisure to attend the solemnity of the dedication of it.

3. The dimensions of it, in which Solomon was instructed, (ver. 3.) as he was in other things by his father. *This was the foundation* (so it may be read (which Solomon laid for the building of the house): This was the rule he went by, so many cubits the length and breadth after the first measure, i. e. according to the measure that was first fixed, which there was no reason to make any alteration of when the work came to be done; for the dimensions were given by divine wisdom, and what God doth it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it or taken from it. Eccl. iii. 14. His first measure will be the last.

4. The ornaments of the temple wherewith it was garnished: The timber work was very fine, and yet within it was overlaid with pure gold, ver. 4. with fine gold, ver. 5. and that embossed with palm trees and chains. It was gold of Parvaim, ver. 6. the best gold. The beams and posts, the walls and doors were overlaid with gold, ver. 7. The most holy place, which was ten yards square, was all overlaid with fine gold, ver. 8. even the upper chambers, or rather the upper floor or roof; top and bottom and sides were all overlaid with gold. Every nail, or screw, or pin, with which the golden plates were fastened to the walls that were overlaid with them, weighed fifty shekels, or were worth so much, workmanship and all. A great many precious stones were dedicated to God, 1 Chron. xxix. 2, 8. and these were set here and there, where they would shew to the best advantage. The finest houses now pretend to no better garnishing than good paint on the roof and walls, but the ornaments of the temple were more substantially rich; it was set with precious stones, because it was a type of the new Jerusalem, which has therefore no temple in it, because it is all temple, and the walls, gates and foundations of which are said to be of precious stones and pearls, Rev. xxi. 18, 19, 21.

10. And in the most holy house he made two cherubims of image-work, and overlaid them with gold.

11. ¶ And the wings of the cherubims were twenty cubits long, one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the other wing was likewise five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub. 12. And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house: and the

other wing *was* five cubits *also*, joining to the wing of the other cherub. 13. The wings of these cherubims spread themselves forth twenty cubits: and they stood on their feet, and their faces *were* inward. 14. ¶ And he made the vail of blue, and purple, and crimson, and fine linen, and wrought cherubims thereon. 15. Also he made before the house two pillars of thirty and five cubits high, and the chapter that *was* on the top of each of them *was* five cubits. 16. And he made chains as in the oracle, and put *them* on the heads of the pillars, and made an hundred pomegranates, and put *them* on the chains. 17. And he reared up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand, Jachin, and the name of that on the left, Boaz.

Here is, 1. An account of the two cherubims, which were set up in the holy of holies. There were two already over the ark, which covered the mercy-seat with their wings, those were small ones. Now the most holy place was enlarged, though those were continued, being appurtenances of the ark, which was not to be made new, as all other utensils of the tabernacle were, yet those two large ones were added doubtless by divine appointment, to fill up the holy place; which otherwise would look bare, like a room unfurnished. These cherubims are said to be of *image work*, ver. 10. designed, it is likely, to represent the angels, who attend the divine Majesty. Each wing extended five cubits, so that the whole was twenty cubits, ver. 12, 13. which was just the breadth of the most holy place, ver. 8. They stood on their feet as servants, their faces inwards towards the ark, ver. 13. that it might appear they were not set there to be adored, for then they would have been sitting as on a throne, and their faces towards their worshippers, but rather as themselves attendants on the visible God. We must not worship angels, but we must worship with angels, for we are come into communion with them. Heb. xii. 22. and must do the will of God as the angels do it. This will help to possess us with reverence of God in all our approaches to him, that we are worshipping him before whom the angels cover their faces. Compare, 1 Cor. xi. 10. with Isa. vi. 2.

2. The vail that parted between the temple and the most holy place, ver. 14. This noted the darkness of that dispensation, and the distance which the worshippers were kept at; but at the death of Christ this vail was rent, for through him we are made nigh, and have boldness not only to look, but to enter into the holiest. On this he wrought cherubims, Heb. He caused them to ascend, i. e. they were made in raised work, embossed. Or, he made them on the wing in an ascending posture; as the other two that stood on their feet in an attending posture, to mind the worshippers to lift up their hearts, and to soar upwards in their devotions.

3. The two pillars which were set up before the temple. Both together were somewhat above thirty-five cubits in length, ver. 15. about eighteen cubits high a-piece, 1 Kings vii. 15, &c. we there took a view of those pillars, Jachin and Boaz, establishment and strength in temple work and by it.

C H A P. IV.

We have here a farther account of the furniture of God's house,

(1.) *Those things that were of brass.* The altar for burnt-offerings, ver. 1. The sea and lavers to hold water, ver. 2—6. The plates with which the doors of his court were overlaid, ver. 9. The vessels of the altar, and other things, ver. 10—18. (2.) *Those that were of gold;* The candlesticks and tables, ver. 7, 8. The altar of incense, ver. 19, and the appurtenances of each of these, ver. 20—22. All these, except the brazen altar, ver. 1. were accounted more largely, 1 Kings vii. 23, &c.

1. **M**OREOVER, he made an altar of brass, twenty cubits the length thereof, and twenty cubits the breadth thereof, and ten cubits the height thereof. ¶ 2. Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof, and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. 3. And under it *was* the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen *were* cast, when it was cast. 4. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking towards the east: and the sea *was* set above upon them, and all their hinder parts *were* inward. 5. And the thickness of it *was* an hand-breadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies: and it received and held three thousand baths. 6. ¶ He made also ten lavers, and put five on the right hand, and five on the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt-offering, they washed in them; but the sea *was* for the priests to wash in. 7. And he made ten candlesticks of gold according to their form, and set *them* in the temple, five on the right hand, and five on the left. 8. He made also ten tables, and placed *them* in the temple, five on the right side, and five on the left; and he made an hundred basons of gold. 9. ¶ Furthermore, he made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid the doors of them with brass. 10. And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south.

David often speaks with much affection, both of the house of the Lord, and of the courts of our God: both without doors and within, there was

that which typified the grace of the gospel, and shadowed out good things to come, of which the substance is Christ.

1. There were those things in the open court in the view of all the people which were very significant.

(1.) There was the *brazen altar*, ver. 1. The making of this was not mentioned in the Kings. On this all the sacrifices were offered, and it sanctified the gift. This altar was four times as large as that which Moses made in the tabernacle; that was five cubits square, this was twenty cubits square. Now Israel was become both more numerous and more rich, and it was to be hoped more devout, (for every age should aim to be wiser and better than that which went before it;) it was expected that there would be greater plenty of offerings brought to God's altar than had been; it is therefore made such a capacious scaffold that it might hold them all, and none might excuse themselves from bringing those testimonies of their devotion, with this, that there was not room to receive them. God had greatly enlarged their borders, it was therefore fit they should enlarge his altars. Our returns should bear some proportions to our receivings. It was ten cubits high, so that the people who worshipped in the courts, might see the sacrifices burnt, and their eye might affect their hearts with sorrow for sin: It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not thus consumed, and that this is accepted as an expiation of my guilt. They might thus be led to consider the great sacrifice which should be offered in the fulness of time, to take away sin and abolish death, which the blood of bulls and goats could not possibly do. And with the smoke of the sacrifices, their hearts might ascend to heaven in holy desires towards God and his favour. In all our devotions we must keep the eye of faith fixed upon Christ the great propitiation. How they went up to this altar, and carried the sacrifices up to it, we are not told; some think by a plain ascent like a hill: If by steps doubtless they were so contrived, as that the end of that law might be answered, Exod. xx. 26. *That thy nakedness be not discovered.*

(2.) There was the molten sea. A very large brass pan, in which they put water for the priests to wash in, ver. 1—6. it was put just at the entrance into the court of the priests, like the font at the church door. If it were filled to the brim it would hold three thousand baths, as here, ver. 5. but ordinarily there were but two thousand in it, 1 Kings vii. 26. The holy Ghost by this signified, (1.) Our great gospel privilege, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, 1 John i. 7. To us there is a fountain opened for all believers, who are spiritual priests, Rev. i. 5, 6. nay, for all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to wash in, from sin which is uncleanness. There is a fulness of merit in Jesus Christ, for all those that by faith apply themselves to him for the purifying of their consciences, that they may serve the living God, Heb. ix. 14. (2.) Our great gospel duty, which is to cleanse ourselves by true repentance from all the pollutions of the flesh, and the corruption that is in the world. Our hearts must be sanctified or we cannot sanctify the name of God. They that draw nigh to God must cleanse their hands, and purify their hearts, James iv. 8. *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me*, and he that is washed still needs to wash his feet, to renew his repentance whenever he goes in to minister, John xii. 10.

(3.) There were ten lavers of brass, in which they washed such things as they offered for the burnt-offerings, ver. 6. As the priests must be washed, so must the sacrifices: We must not only purify ourselves in preparation for our religious performances, but carefully put away all those vain thoughts and corrupt aims, which cleave to our performances themselves and pollute them.

(4.) The doors of the court were overlaid with brass, ver. 9. both for strength and beauty, that they might not be rotted with the weather, to which they were exposed. Gates of brass we read of, Psalm cvii. 16.

2. There were those things in the house of the Lord, into which the priests only went in to minister, that were very significant. All was of gold there; the nearer we come to God, the purer we must be, the purer shall be.

1. There were ten golden candlesticks, according to the form of that one which was in the tabernacle, ver. 7. The written word is a lamp and a light, shining in a dark place. In Moses's time they had but one candlestick, the Pentateuch, but the additions which in process of time were to be added of other books of scripture, might be signified by this increase of the number of the candlesticks. Light was growing. The candlesticks are the churches, Rev. i. 20. Moses set up but one, the church of the Jews; but in the gospel temple, not only believers but churches are multiplied.

2. There were ten golden tables, ver. 8. Tables whereon the shew-bread was set, ver. 19. Perhaps every one of the tables had twelve loaves of shew-bread on it; as the house was enlarged, the house keeping was; *In my Father's house there is bread enough* for the whole family. To those tables belonged an hundred golden basons or dishes; for God's table is well furnished.

3. There was a golden altar, ver. 19. on which they burnt incense. It is likely, this was enlarged in proportion to the brazen altar. Christ, that once for all made an atonement for sin, ever lives making intercession in the virtue of that atonement.

11. And Hiram made the pots, and the shovels, and the basons, and Hiram finished the work that he was to make for king Solomon for the house of God; 12. To wit, the two pillars, and the pommels, and the chapters which were on the top of the two pillars, and the two wreaths to cover the two pommels of the chapters which were on the top of the pillars: 13. And four hundred pomegranates on the two wreaths; two rows of pomegranates on each wreath, to cover the two pommels of the chapters, which were upon the pillars. 14. He made also basins; and lavers made he upon the bases; 15. One sea, and twelve oxen under it: 16. The pots also and the shovels, and the flesh-hooks, and all their instruments, did Hiram his father make to king Solomon for the house of the LORD, of bright brass. 17. In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them, in the clay ground, between Succoth and Zeredatha. 18. Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out. 19. ¶ And Solomon made all the vessels that were for the house of God, the golden altar also, and the tables whereon the shew-bread was set; 20. Moreover, the candlesticks with their lamps, that they should burn after the manner, before the oracle, of pure gold; 21. And

21. And the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs *made of gold, and that perfect gold.* 22. And the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers, of pure gold, and the entry of the house, the inner doors thereof for the most holy place, and the doors of the house of the temple, *were of gold.*

We have here such a summary, both of the brass work and of the gold work of the temple, as we had before, 1 Kings vii. 13. &c. in which we have nothing more to observe here, but, (1.) That Hiram the workman was very punctual. *He finished all that he was to make,* ver. 11. and left no part of his work undone. *Hiram his father* he is called, ver. 16. Probably, it was a sort of a nick-name by which he was commonly known; Father Hiram; for the king of Tyre called him *Hiram Abi*, My father; in compliance with whom Solomon called him his; he being a great artist, and father of the artificers in brass and iron. He acquitted himself very well both for ingenuity and industry. (2.) Solomon was very generous. He made all the vessels in great abundance, ver. 18. many of a sort, that many hands might be employed, and so the work might go on with expedition; or that some might be laid up for use when others were worn out. Freely he has received, and he will freely give; when he had made vessels now for the present, he would not convert the remainder of the brass to his own use; it is devoted to God, and it shall be used for him.

C H A P. V.

The temple being built and furnished for God, we have here, (1.) Possession given to him, by bringing in the dedicated things, ver. 1. but especially the ark, the token of his presence, ver. 2—10. (2.) Possession taken by him, in a cloud, ver. 11—14. For if any man open the door of his heart to God, he will come in, Rev. iii. 20.

1. **T**HUS all the work that Solomon made for the house of the LORD, was finished: and Solomon brought in all the things, that David his father had dedicated; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments put he among the treasures of the house of God. 2. ¶ Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD, out of the city of David, which is Zion. 3. Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast, which was in the seventh month. 4. And all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark. 5. And they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests, and the Levites bring up. 6. Also king Solomon and all the congregation of Israel that were assembled unto him before the ark sacrificed sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude. 7. And the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto his place, to the oracle of the house into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims. 8. For the cherubims spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above. 9. And they drew out the staves of the ark, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle, but they were not seen without. And there it is unto this day. 10. There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt.

This agrees with what we had 1 Kings viii. 2, &c. where an account was given of the solemn introducing of the ark into the new-erected temple.

1. There needed no great solemnity for the bringing in of the dedicated things, ver. 1. They added to the wealth, and perhaps were so disposed as to add to the beauty of it, but they could not add to the holiness; for it was the temple that sanctified the gold, Matt. xxiii. 17. See how just Solomon was both to God and to his father; whatever David had dedicated to God, though he had never so much mind to it himself, he would by no means alienate it, but put it among the treasures of the temple. Those children that would inherit their godly parents blessings, must religiously pursue their pious intentions, and not defeat them. When Solomon had made all the vessels of the temple in abundance, chap. iv. 18. there was a great deal of the materials left, which he would not convert to any other use, but laid it up in the treasury for a time of need. Dedicated things must not be alienated. It is a sacrilege to do it.

2. But it was fit the ark should be brought in with great solemnity, and so it was. All the other vessels were made new, and bigger in proportion to the house than they had been in the tabernacle; but the ark with the mercy-seat and the cherubims were the same; for the presence and grace of God is the same in little assemblies that it is in large ones, in the poor condition of the church, that it is in its prosperous estate; wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name, there is he as truly present with them, as if there were two or three thousand. The ark was brought in attended by a great assembly of the elders of Israel, who came to grace the solemnity, and a very sumptuous appearance, no doubt, they made, ver. 2, 3, 4. It was carried by the priests, ver. 7. brought into the most holy place, and put under the wings of the great cherubims which Solomon had set up there, ver. 7, 8. There they are unto this day; not the day when this book was written after the captivity, but when that was written out of which this story was transcribed. Or, they were there, (so it might better be read) unto this day, the day of Jerusalem's desolations, that fatal day, Psal. cxxxvii. 7. The ark was a type of Christ, and as such a token of the presence of God; that gracious promise, *Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world,* doth in effect bring the ark into our religious assemblies, if we by faith and

prayer put that promise in suit, and this we should be most solicitous and earnest for, *Lord, if thy presence go not up with us, wherefore should we go up?* The temple itself, if Christ leave it, is a desolate place, Matt. xxiii. 34.

3. With the ark they brought up the tabernacle, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, ver. 5. They were not alienated, because they had been dedicated to God; not altered or melted down for the new work, because there was no need of them; but they were carefully laid up as monuments of antiquity, and as many of the vessels as were fit for use, it is likely, were still used.

4. This was done with great joy. They kept a holy feast upon the occasion, ver. 3. and sacrificed sheep and oxen without number, ver. 6. Note, 1. The establishment of the public worship of God, according to his institution, and with the tokens of his presence, is and ought to be matter of great joy to any people. 2. When Christ is formed in a soul, the law written in the heart, the ark of the covenant settled there, so that it becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost, there is true satisfaction in that soul. 3. Whatever we have the comfort of, we must by the sacrifices of praise give God the glory of, and not be straitened therein; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. If God favour us with his presence, we must honour him with our services the best we have.

11. ¶ And it came to pass when the priests were come out of the holy place (for all the priests that were present were sanctified, and did not then wait by course. 12. Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons, and their brethren; being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals, and psalteries, and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests, sounding with trumpets.) 13. It came even to pass as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lift up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD; 14. So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

Solomon and the elders of Israel had done what they could to grace the solemnity of the introduction of the ark; but God, by testifying his acceptance of what they did, put the greatest honour upon it. The cloud of glory that filled the house, beautified it more than all the gold with which it was overlaid, or the precious stones with which it was garnished, and yet that was no glory in comparison with the glory of the gospel-dispensation, 2 Cor. iii. 9, 10. Observe,

1. How God took possession of the temple; he filled it with a cloud, ver. 13. (1.) That he signified his acceptance of this temple to be the same to him that the tabernacle of Moles was, and assured them, that he would be the same in it; for it was by a cloud that he made his public entry into that, Exod. xl. 34. (2.) Thus he considered the weakness and infirmity of those to whom he manifested himself, who could not bear the dazzling lustre of the divine light, it would have over-powered them, he therefore spread a cloud upon it, Job xxvi. 9. Christ revealed things to his disciples as they were able to bear them, and in parables, which wrapped up divine things as in a cloud. (3.) Thus he would affect all that worshipped in his courts with holy reverence and fear. Christ's disciples were afraid when they entered into a cloud, Luke ix. 34. (4.) Thus he would intimate the darkness of that dispensation, by reason of which they could not steadfastly look to the end of those things that are now abolished, 2 Cor. iii. 13.

2. When he took possession of it. (1.) When the priests were come out of the holy place, ver. 11. This is the way of giving possession: All must come out that the rightful owner may come in. Would we have God dwell in our hearts, we must leave room for him; let every thing else give way. We are here told, that upon this occasion the whole family of the priests attended, and not any one particular course; all the priests that were present were sanctified, ver. 11. because there was work enough for them all, when such a multitude of sacrifices were to be offered, and because it was fit they should all be eye-witnesses of this solemnity, and receive the impressions of it. (2.) When the singers and musicians praised God, then the house was filled with a cloud. This is very observable; it was not when they offered sacrifices, but when they sung the praises of God, that God gave them this token of his favour; for the sacrifice of praise pleases the Lord better than that of an ox or bullock, Psal. lxxix. 31. All the singers and musicians were employed, those of each of the three families; and to complete the concert one hundred and twenty priests with their trumpets joined with them, all standing at the east-end of the altar, on that side of the court which lay outmost towards the people, ver. 12. And when this part of the service began, the glory of God appeared. Observe, 1. It was when they were unanimous, when they were as one, to make one sound. The Holy Ghost descended on the apostles when they met with one accord, Acts ii. 1. Where unity is, the Lord commands the blessing. 2. It was when they were lively and hearty, and lift up their voice to praise the Lord: Then we serve God acceptably, when we are fervent in spirit, serving him. 3. It was when they were in their praises celebrating the everlasting mercy and goodness of God. As there is no one saying more often repeated in scripture than this, *his mercy endureth for ever*; (it is twenty-six times in one psalm, (Psal. cxxxvi.) and often elsewhere) so there is none more signally owned from heaven, for it was not the expression of some rapturous flights that the priests were singing, when the glory of God appeared, but this plain song, *he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever*. Which should make us in love with those words. God's goodness is his glory, and he is pleased when we give him the glory of it.

3. What was the effect of it? The priests themselves could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, ver. 14. which, as it was an evidence that the law made men priests that had infirmity, so (as Bishop Patrick observes) it was a plain intimation that the Levitical priesthood should cease, and stand no longer to minister, when the Messiah should come, in whom the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily. In him the glory of God dwelt among us, but covered with a cloud: the Word was made flesh, and when he comes to his temple, like a refiner's fire, who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? Mal. iii. 1, 2.

C H A P. VI.

The glory of the Lord, in the vehicle of a thick cloud, having filled the house which Solomon built, by which God manifested his presence there, he presently lays hold on the opportunity, and addresseth himself to God, as a God now in a peculiar manner nigh at hand. (1.) He makes a solemn declaration of his intent and meaning in the building this house, to the satisfaction of the people, and the honour of God, both which he blessed, ver. 1—11. (2.) He makes a solemn prayer to God, that he would please graciously to accept and answer all the prayers that should be made in or towards that house, ver. 12—42. This whole chapter we had before with very little variation, 1 Kings viii. 12—53. to which it may not be amiss here to look back.

1. **T**HEN said Solomon, The LORD hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. 2. But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever. 3. And the king turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel (and all the congregation of Israel stood.) 4. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who hath with his hands fulfilled that which he spake with his mouth to my father David, saying, 5. Since the day that I chose no city among all the tribes of Israel to build an house in, that my name might be there, neither chose I any man to be a ruler over my people Israel: 6. But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there, and have chosen David to be over my people Israel. 7. Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house, for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 8. But the LORD said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well in that it was in thine heart, 9. Notwithstanding, thou shalt not build the house, but thy son which shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house for my name. 10. The LORD therefore hath performed his word that he hath spoken: for I am risen up in the room of David my father, and am set on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. 11. And in it I have put the ark, wherein is the covenant of the LORD, that he made with the children of Israel.

It is of great consequence in all our religious actions that we design well, and that our eye be single. If Solomon had built this temple in the pride of his heart, as Ahaberus made his feast, only to *show the riches of his kingdom, and the honour of his majesty*, it would not have turned at all to his account. But he here declares upon what inducements he undertook it, and they are such as not only justify, but magnify the undertaking.

1. He did it for the glory and honour of God; this was his highest and ultimate end in it. It was for the name of the Lord God of Israel, ver. 10. to be a house of habitation for him, ver. 2. He has indeed, as to us, *made darkness his pavilion*, ver. 1. but let this house be the residence of that darkness; for it is in the upper world that he dwells in light, such as no eye can approach.

2. He did it in compliance with the choice God had been pleased to make of Jerusalem, to be the city in which he would record his name, ver. 6. *I have chosen Jerusalem.* A great many stately buildings there were in Jerusalem for the king, his princes, and the royal family: If God choose that place, it is fit there be a building for him, which may excel all the rest. Were men thus honoured there; let God be thus honoured.

3. He did it in pursuance of his father's good intentions, which he never had an opportunity to put in execution. *It was in the heart of David my father to build a house for God*; the project was his, be it known to his honour, ver. 7. and God approved of it, though he permitted him not to put it in execution, ver. 8. *Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.* Temple-work is often thus done, one sows and another reaps, John iv. 37, 38. One age begins that which the next brings to perfection; and let not the wisest of men think it any disparagement to them to pursue the good designs which those that went before them have laid, and to build upon their foundation. Every good piece is not an original.

4. He did it in performance of the word which God had spoken. God had said, *Thy son shall build the house for my name*, and now I have done it, ver. 9, 10. The service was appointed him, and the honour of it designed him by the divine promise; so that he did not do it of his own head, but was called of God to it. He that appoints the work, it is fit he should have the appointing of the workmen; and those may go on in their work with great satisfaction, who see their call to it clear.

12. ¶ And he stood before the altar of the LORD, in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands; 13. (For Solomon had made a brazen scaffold, of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court, and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven.) 14. And said, O LORD God of Israel, *there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which keepest covenant, and shewest mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts*: 15. Thou which hast kept with thy servant David my father, that which thou hast promised him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day,

16. Now therefore, O LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, *There shall not fail thee a man in my fight to sit upon the throne of Israel*; yet so, that the children take heed to their way to walk in my law, as thou hast walked before me. 17. Now then, O LORD God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou hast spoken unto thy servant David. 18. (But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee? how much less this house which I have built!) 19. Have respect therefore to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee: 20. That thine eyes may be opened upon this house day and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said, that thou wouldst put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer, which thy servant prayeth toward this place. 21. Hearken therefore unto the supplications of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, which they shall make toward this place: hear thou from thy dwelling-place: *even from heaven*, and when thou hearest, forgive. 22. ¶ If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to make him swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: 23. Then hear thou from heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, by requiting the wicked, by recompensing his way upon his own head, and by justifying the righteous, by giving him according to his righteousness. 24. ¶ And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication before thee in this house: 25. Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them, and to their fathers. 26. ¶ When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them: 27. Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance. 28. ¶ If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever fore, or whatsoever sickness there be: 29. Then what prayer, or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own fore, and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: 30. Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men): 31. That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. 32. ¶ Moreover, concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for thy great name's sake, and thy mighty hand, and thy stretched-out arm; if they come and pray in this house: 33. Then hear thou from the heavens, *even from thy dwelling-place*, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all people of the earth may know thy name, and fear thee, as doth thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built, is called by thy name, 34. If thy people go out to war against their enemies, by the way that thou shalt send them, and they pray unto thee toward this city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: 35. Then hear thou from the heavens their prayer, and their supplication, and maintain their cause. 36. If they sin against thee (for *there is no man which sinneth not*) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives unto a land far off or near? 37. Yet if they bethink themselves in the land whither they are carried captive, and turn, and pray unto thee in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly; 38. If they return to thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their captivity, whither they have carried them captives, and pray toward their land which thou gavest unto their fathers, and toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house which I have built for thy name;

name: 39. Then hear thou from the heavens, *even* from thy dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee. 40. Now, my God, let (I beseech thee) thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayers *that is made* in this place. 41. Now therefore arise, O LORD God, into thy resting-place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O LORD God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. 42. O LORD God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant

Solomon had in the foregoing verses signed and sealed (as it were) the deed of dedication, by which the temple was appropriated to the honour and service of God; now here he prays the consecration prayer, by which it was made a figure of Christ, the great mediator through whom we are to offer all our prayers, and to expect all God's favours, and to whom we are to have an eye in every thing wherein we have to do with God.

We opened the particulars of this prayer, 1 Kings viii. and therefore shall now only glean up some few passages in it, which may be the proper subjects of our meditation.

1. Here are some doctrinal truths occasionally laid down. As, (1.) That the God of Israel is a being of incomparable perfection. We cannot describe him; but this we know, there is *none like him in heaven or earth*, ver. 14. All the creatures have their fellow-creatures; but the Creator has not his peer: He is infinitely above all, and *over all God blessed for ever*. (2.) That he is, and will be true to every word that he hath spoken, and all that serve him in sincerity, shall certainly find him both faithful and kind. Those that set God always before them, and *walk before him with all their hearts*, shall find him as good as his word, and better; he will both keep covenant with them, and shew mercy to them, ver. 14. (3.) That he is a being infinite and immense, whom the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain, and to whose felicity nothing is added by the utmost we can do in his service, ver. 18. He is infinitely beyond the bounds of the creation, and infinitely above the praises of all intelligent creatures. (4.) That he and he only knows the hearts of the children of men, ver. 30. All men's thoughts, aims and affections are naked and open before him, and however the imaginations and intents of our hearts may be concealed from men, angels, and devils, they cannot be hid from God, who knows not only what is in the heart, but the heart itself, and all the beatings of it. (5.) That there is no such thing as a sinless perfection to be found in this life, ver. 36. *There is no man that sinneth not*; nay, which doth good and sinneth not; so he writes agreeable to what he here saith, *Eccles. vii. 20*.

2. Here are some suppositions or cases put, which are to be taken notice of. (1.) He supposeth that if doubts and controversies arose between man and man, both sides would agree to appeal to God, and to lay an oath upon the person whose testimony must decide the matter, ver. 22. The religious reverence of an oath, as it was ancient, so it may be presumed it will continue, as long as there are any remains of conscience and right reason among men. (2.) He supposeth, though now Israel enjoyed a profound peace and tranquillity, that troublesome times would come; he did not think the mountain of their prosperity stood so strong but that it might be moved; nay, he expected sin would move it. (3.) He supposeth that those who had not called upon God at other times, yet in their affliction would seek him early and earnestly. When they are in distress they will confess their sins, and confess thy name, and make supplication to thee. Trouble will drive those to God that had said to him depart, ver. 24, 26, 28. (4.) He supposeth that strangers would come from afar to worship the God of Israel, and to pay homage to him; and this also might reasonably be expected, considering what worthless things the gods of the nations were, and what proofs the God of Israel had given of his being Lord of the whole earth.

3. Here are petitions very pertinent.

1. That God would own this house, and have an eye to it, as the place of which he had said he would put his name there, ver. 20. He could not in faith have asked God to shew such peculiar favour to this house above any other, if he himself had not said it should be his rest for ever. The prayer that will speed, must be warranted by the word. We may therefore with humble confidence pray to God to be well pleased with us in Jesus Christ, because he has declared himself well pleased in him; *this is my beloved son*; but faith not now of any house, this is my beloved place.

2. That God would hear and accept the prayers which should be made in or towards that place, ver. 21. He asks not that God should help them unless they prayed for themselves; but that God would help them in answer to their prayers: Even Christ's intercessions do not supersede, but encourage our supplications. He prays that God would hear from his dwelling-place, even from heaven; that is his dwelling-place; not this temple; and thence help must come.

And when thou hearest forgive. Note, The forgiveness of one sin is that which makes way for all other answers to our prayers, *removendo prohibens*.

3. That God would give judgment according to equity, upon all the appeals that should be made to him, ver. 23—30. This we may in faith pray for, for we are sure it shall be done; God sitteth in the throne judging right.

4. That God would return in mercy to his people, when they repented and reformed, and sought unto him, ver. 25, 27, 38, 39. This we also may in faith pray for, building upon the repeated declarations God had made of his readiness to accept penitents.

5. That God would bid the strangers welcome to this house, and answer their prayers, ver. 33. for if there be in duty, why should not there be in privilege, one law for the stranger and one born in the land? *Lev. xxiv. 22*.

6. That God would upon all occasions, own and plead the cause of his people Israel, against all the opposers of it, ver. 35. *maintain their cause*; and again, ver. 39. If they be the Israel of God, their cause is the cause of God, and he will espouse it.

Lastly, He concludes this prayer with some expressions which he had learnt of his good father, and borrowed from one of his psalms. We had them not in the Kings, but here we have them, ver. 41, 42. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, and how can we express ourselves in better language to God, than that of his own Spirit? But these words were in a special manner of use to direct Solomon, because they had reference to this very work that he was now doing. We have them, *Psal. cxxxii. 8, 9, 10*. He prays, (ver. 41.) 1. That God would take possession of the temple, and keep possession; that he would make it his place, his resting place. Thou and the ark; what will the ark do without the God of the ark! ordinances without the God of the ordinances! 2. That he would make the ministers of the temple public blessings, *clothe them with salvation*. i. e. not only save them, but make them instrumental to save others, by

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offering the sacrifices of righteousness. 3. That the service of the temple might turn abundantly to the joy and satisfaction of all the Lord's people. *Let thy saints rejoice, in goodness*, i. e. in the goodness of thy house, *Plal. lxxv. 4*. Let all that come hither to worship, like the Eunuch, go away rejoicing. He pleads two things, ver. 42. (1.) His own relation to God; *turn not away the face of thine anointed*: Lord, thou hast appointed me to be king, and wilt not thou own me? (2.) God's covenant with his father. *Remember the mercies of David thy servant*. The piety of David towards God, so some understand it, and so the word sometimes signifies, his pious care of the ark, and concern for it. See *Psal. cxxxii. 1, 2, &c.* Or, the promises of God to David, which were mercies to him, his great support and comfort in all his troubles. We may plead as Solomon doth here, with an eye to Christ. We deserve that God should turn away our face, that he should reject us and our prayers, but we come in the name of The Lord Jesus, *thine anointed, thy Messiah*, so the word is; thy Christ, so the Seventy. Him thou hearest always, and wilt never turn away his face. We have no righteousness of our own to plead, but Lord remember the mercies of David thy servant. Christ is God's servant, *Ihu. xlii. 1*. and is called David, *Hos. iii. 5*. Lord remember his merits, and accept of us on the account of them. Remember his tender concern for his Father's honour, and man's salvation, and what he did and suffered from that principle. Remember the promises of the everlasting covenant, which free grace has made to us in Christ, and which are called the sure mercies of David, *Ihu. lv. 3*. and *Acts xiii. 34*. This must be all our desire, and all our hope, all our prayer and all our plea, for it is all our salvation.

C H A P. VII.

In this chapter we have God's answer to Solomon's prayer. (1.) His public answer by fire from heaven, which consumed the sacrifices ver. 1. with which the priests and people were much afflicted, ver. 2, 3. and by that token of God's acceptance were encouraged to continue the solemnities of the feast for fourteen days, and Solomon was encouraged to pursue all his designs for the honour of God, ver. 4—11. (2.) His private answer by word of mouth, in a dream or vision of the night, ver. 12—23. Most of these things we had before, 1 Kings viii. and ix.

1. NOW when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house. 3. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever. 4. ¶ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. 5. And king Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep: so the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6. And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of music of the LORD, which David the king had made to praise the LORD, because his mercy endureth for ever, when David praised by their ministry: and the priests sounded trumpets before them, and all Israel stood. 7. Moreover, Solomon hallowed the middle of the court that was before the house of the LORD: for there he offered burnt-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings, because the brazen altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt-offerings, and the meat-offerings, and the fat. 8. ¶ Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great congregation, from the entering in of Hamath, unto the river of Egypt. 9. And in the eighth day they made a solemn assembly: for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. 10. And on the three and twentieth day of the seventh month, he sent the people away into their tents glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the LORD had shewed unto David and to Solomon, and to Israel his people. 11. Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of the LORD, and in his own house, he prosperously effected.

Here is, 1. The gracious return which God immediately made to Solomon's prayers. The fire came down from heaven, and consumed the sacrifices, ver. 1. In this way God testified his acceptance of Moses, *Lev. ix. 24*. of Gideon, *Judg. vi. 21*. of David, 1 *Chron. xxi. 26*. of Elijah, 1 *Kings xviii. 38*. and in general, to accept the burnt-sacrifice, is in the Hebrew phrase, to turn it to ashes, *Psal. xx. 3*. The fire came down here not upon the killing of the sacrifices, but the praying of the prayer. This fire spake God, (1.) Glorious in himself, for our God is a consuming fire, terrible even in his holy places. This fire breaking forth (as it is probable) out of the thick darkness, made it the more terrible, as on mount Sinai, *Exod. xxiv. 16, 17*. The sinners in Zion had reason to be afraid of this sight; and to say, *who among us shall dwell near this devouring fire?* *Isa. xxxiii. 14*. And yet, (2.) Gracious to Israel; for this fire which might justly have consumed them, fastened upon the sacrifice which was offered in their stead, and consumed that, by which God signified to them, that he accepted their offerings, and that his anger was turned away from them. Let us apply this, 1. To the sufferings of Christ; when it pleased the Lord to bruise him and put him to grief, in that he shewed his good-will to men, having laid on him the ini-

quity of all. His death was our life, and he was made sin and a curse, that we might inherit righteousness and a blessing. That sacrifice was consumed that we might escape; *Here am I, let these go their way.* (2.) To the sanctification of the Spirit, who descended like fire, burning up our lusts and corruption, those beasts that must be sacrificed, or we are undone; and kindling in our souls a holy fire of pious and devout affections, always to be kept burning on the altar of the heart. The surest evidence of God's acceptance of our prayers, is the descent of this holy fire upon us, *did not our hearts burn within us?* Luke xxiv. 32. And as a farther evidence that God accepted Solomon's prayer, *still the glory of the Lord filled the house.* The heart that is thus filled with a holy awe and reverence of the divine glory, to which God manifests himself in his greatness, and (which is no less his glory) in his goodness, is thereby owned as a living temple.

2. The grateful return made to God for this gracious token of his favour.

(1.) The people worshipped and praised God, ver. 3. When they saw the fire of God come down from heaven thus, they did not run away in a fright, but kept their ground in the courts of the Lord, and took occasion from it, 1. With reverence to adore the glory of God; they bowed their faces to the ground, and worshipped, thus expressing their awful dread of the divine Majesty, their cheerful submission to the divine authority, and the sense they had of their unworthiness to come into his presence, and their inability to stand before the power of his wrath. 2. With thankfulness to acknowledge the goodness of God, even then when the fire of the Lord came down, yet they praised him, saying, *For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever.* That is a song never out of season, and to which our hearts and tongues should be never out of tune. However it be, yet God is good. When he manifests himself as a consuming fire to sinners, his people can rejoice in him as their light. Nay, they had reason to say, that in this God was good; *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*, but the sacrifice in our stead, for which we are bound to be very thankful.

(2.) The king and all the people offered sacrifices in abundance, ver. 4. 5. With these they feasted this holy fire, and bid it welcome to the altar. They had offered sacrifices before, but now they increased them. Note, The tokens of God's favour to us should enlarge our hearts in his service, and make us to abound therein more and more. The king's example stirred up the people. Good work is then likely to go on, when the leaders of a people lead in it. The sacrifices were so numerous, that the altar could not contain them all, but rather than any of them should be turned back, though we may suppose the blood of them all was sprinkled upon the altar, yet the flesh of the burnt-offerings, and the fat of the peace-offerings was burnt in the midst of the court, ver. 7. which Solomon either hallowed for that service, or hallowed by it. In case of necessity, the pavement might be an altar.

(3.) The priests did their parts, they waited on their offices; and the singers and the musicians on theirs, ver. 6. with the instruments that David made, and the hymn that David had put into their hands, as some think it may be read, meaning that, 1 Chron. xvi. 7. Or, as we read it, when David praised by their ministry. He employed, directed, and encouraged them in this work of praising God, and therefore their performances were accepted as his act, and he is said to praise by their ministry.

(4.) The whole congregation expressed the greatest joy and satisfaction imaginable. They kept the feast of the dedication of the altar seven days, from the second to the ninth, then the tenth day was the day of atonement, when they were to afflict their souls for sin, and that was not unreasonable in the midst of their rejoicings; then on the 15th day began the feast of tabernacles, which continued to the 22d, and they did not part till the 23d. We must never grudge the time that we spend in the service of God, and communion with him; nor think it long, or grow sick of it.

(5.) Solomon went on in his work, and prosperously effected all he designed, for the adorning both of God's house and his own, ver. 11. Those that begin with the service of God, are likely to go on successfully in their own affairs. It was Solomon's praise, that what he undertook he went through with, and it was by the grace of God that he prospered in it.

12. ¶ And the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself, for an house of sacrifice. 13. If I shut up heaven, that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; 14. If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. 15. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. 16. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. 17. And as for thee, If thou wilt walk before me as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments; 18. Then will I establish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. 19. But if ye turn away and forsake my statutes and my commandments which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods, and worship them: 20. Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a by-word among all nations. 21. And this house which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it: so that he shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land and unto this house? 22. And it shall be answered, Because they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and laid hold on other gods, and worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath he brought all this evil upon them.

That God accepted Solomon's prayer, appeared by the fire from heaven: But it is possible a prayer may be accepted, and yet not answered in the letter of it; and therefore God appeared to him in the night, as he did once before, chap. i. 7. and after a day of sacrifice too, as then; and gave him a particular answer to his prayer. We had the substance of it before, 1 Kings ix. 2—9.

1. He promised to own this house, for a house of sacrifice to Israel, and a house of prayer for all people, *Ist. lvi. 7. ver. 12—16. My name shall be there for ever, i. e. there will I make myself known, and there I will be called upon.*

2. He promised to answer the prayers of his people that should at any time be made in that place, ver. 13, 14, 15. (1.) National judgments are here supposed, ver. 13. Famine and pestilence, and perhaps war, is intended by the locusts devouring the land, enemies as greedy as locusts and laying all waste. (2.) National repentance, prayer, and reformation are required, ver. 14. God expects that his people, who are called by his name, if they have dishonoured his name by their iniquity, should honour it by accepting the punishment of their iniquity. They must humble themselves under his hand, must pray for the removal of the judgment, must seek the face and favour of God; and yet all this will not do, unless they turn from their wicked ways, and return to the God from whom they have revolted. (3.) National mercy is then promised; that God will forgive their sin, which brought the judgment upon them, and then heal their land, redress all their grievances. Pardoning mercy makes way for healing mercy, *Psal. ciii. 3. Matth. ix. 2.*

3. He promises to perpetuate Solomon's kingdom, upon condition he persevered in his duty, ver. 17, 18. If he hoped for the benefit of God's covenant with David, he must imitate the example of David.

But he sets before him death as well as life, the curse as well as the blessing. 1. He supposeth it possible, that though they had this temple built to the honour of God, yet they might be drawn aside to worship other gods, ver. 19. He knew their bent to backslide into that sin. 2. He threatens it as certain, that if they did so, it would certainly be the ruin both of church and state. (1.) It would be the ruin of their state, ver. 20. Though they have taken deep root, and taken root long in this good land, yet I will pluck them up by the roots, extirpate the whole nation, pluck them up as men pluck up weeds out of their garden, which are thrown to the dung-hill. (2.) It would be the ruin of their church; this sanctuary would be no sanctuary to them, to protect them from the judgments of God, as they imagined, saying, *The temple of the Lord are we*, Jer. vii. 4. This house which is high, not only for the magnificence of its structure, but for the designed ends and uses of it, shall be an astonishment, it shall come down wonderfully, *Lam. i. 9.* to the amazement of all the neighbours.

C H A P. VIII.

In this chapter we are told, (1.) What cities Solomon built, ver. 1—6. (2.) What workmen Solomon employed, ver. 7—10. (3.) What care he took about a proper settlement for his wife, ver. 11. (4.) What a good method he put the temple-service into, ver. 12—16. (5.) What trading he had with foreign countries, ver. 17, 18.

1. **A**ND it came to pass (at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the house of the LORD, and his own house.) 2. That the cities which Hiram had restored to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there. 3. And Solomon went to Hamath-zobah, and prevailed against it. 4. And he built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the store cities, which he built in Hamath. 5. Also he built Beth-horon the upper, and Beth-horon the nether, fenced cities, with walls, gates, and bars: 6. And Baalath, and all the store-cities, that Solomon had, and all the chariot-cities, and the cities of the horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and throughout all the land of his dominion. 7. ¶ As for all the people that were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which were not of Israel; 8. But of their children who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel consumed not; them did Solomon make to pay tribute, until this day. 9. But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work: but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and captains of his chariots and horsemen. 10. And these were the chief of king Solomon's officers, even two hundred and fifty, that bare rule over the people. 11. ¶ And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David, unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.

This we had 1 Kings ix. 10—24. and therefore shall only observe here,

1. That though Solomon was a man of great learning and knowledge, yet he spent his days not in contemplation but in action, not in his study but in his country, in building cities and fortifying them. In time of peace preparing for a time of war, which is as much a man's business, as it is in summer to provide food for winter.

2. As he was a man of business himself, and did not consult his own ease, so he employed a great many hands, kept abundance of people to work. It is the interest of a state by all means possible to promote and encourage industry, and to keep its subjects from idleness. A great many strangers there were in Israel, many that remained of the Canaanites, and they were welcome to live there, but not to live and do nothing. The men of Laish, that had no business, were an easy prey to the invaders, *Judges xviii. 7.*

3. That when Solomon had begun with building the house of God, and made good work and quick work of that, he prospered in all his undertakings, so that he built all that he desired to build, ver. 6. Those that have a genius

a genius for building find that one project draws on another, and the latter must amend and improve the former. Now observe, (1.) How the divine providence even gratified Solomon's humour, and gave him success not only in all that he needed to build, and that was for his advantage to build, but in all that he had a mind to build. So indulgent a father is God sometimes to the innocent desires of his children that serve him. Thus he pleased Jacob with that promise, *Joseph shall put his hand on thine eyes.* (2.) That Solomon knew how to set bounds to his desires. He was none of those that enlarge them endlessly, and can never be satisfied, but knew when to take up; for he finished all he desired, and then he desired no more; did not sit down to fret that he had no more cities to build, as Alexander did, that he had no more worlds to conquer, *Heb. ii. 5.*

4. That one reason why Solomon built a palace on purpose for the queen, and removed her and her court to it, was because he thought it by no means proper that she should dwell in the house of David, ver. 11. considering that that had been a place of great piety, and perhaps her house was a place of great vanity. She was profelyted, it is likely, to the Jewish religion but it is a question whether all her servants were. Perhaps, they had among them the idols of Egypt, and a great deal of profaneness and debauchery, it may be. Now though Solomon had not zeal and courage enough to suppress and punish what was amiss there, yet he so far consulted the honour of his father's memory, that he would not suffer that place to be thus profaned, where the ark of God had been, and where holy David had prayed many a good prayer, and sung many a sweet psalm. Not that all the places where the ark had been, were so holy as never to be put to a common use, for then the houses of Abinadab and Obed-edom must have been so. But the place where it had been so long, and had been so publicly attended on, was so venerable, that it was not fit to be the place of so much gaiety, not to say iniquity, as was to be found, or was to be feared, in the court that Pharaoh's daughter kept. Note, Between things sacred and things common, the ancient land-marks ought to be kept up. It was an outer court of the temple that was the court of the women.

12. ¶ Then Solomon offered burnt-offerings unto the LORD, on the altar of the LORD, which he had built before the porch: 13. Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new-moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles. 14. ¶ And he appointed, according to the order of David his father, the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges, to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required: the porters also by their courses, at every gate: for so had David the man of God commanded. 15. And they departed not from the commandment of the king unto the priests and Levites, concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures. 16. Now all the work of Solomon was prepared unto the day of the foundation of the house of the LORD, and until it was finished: so the house of the LORD was perfected. 17. ¶ Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea-side in the land of Edom. 18. And Huram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon.

Here is, 1. Solomon's devotion. The building of the temple was in order to the service of the temple; whatever cost he was at in the rearing the structure, it he had neglected the worship that was to be performed there, it had been all to no purpose. Assisting the devotions of others, will not atone for our own neglects. When Solomon had built the temple,

(1.) He kept up the holy sacrifices there according to the law of Moses, ver. 12, 13. In vain had the altar been built, and in vain had fire come down from heaven, if sacrifices had not been constantly brought as the food of that altar, and the fuel of that fire. There were daily sacrifices, a certain rate every day, as duty as the day came; weekly sacrifices on the sabbath, double to what was offered on other days; monthly sacrifices, on the new moons; and yearly sacrifices, at the three solemn feasts. They are spiritual sacrifices that are now required of us, which we are to bring daily and weekly; and it is good to be in a settled method of devotion.

(2.) He kept the holy songs there, according to the law of David, who is here called the man of God, as Moses was, because he was both instructed and authorized of God to make these establishments; and Solomon took care to see them observed, as the duty of every day required, ver. 14. Solomon, though a wife and great man, and the builder of the temple, did not attempt to amend, alter, or add to what the man of God had in God's name commanded, but closely adhered to that, and used his authority to have that duly observed, and then none departed from the commandment of the king concerning any matter, ver. 15. He observed God's laws, and then all obeyed his orders. When the service of the temple was put into this good order, then it is said, the house of the Lord was perfected, ver. 16. The work was the main matter, not the place, the temple was unfinished till this was done.

2. Solomon's merchandise. He did himself in person visit the sea port towns of Eloth and Ezion-geber, for they that deal much in the world, will find it their interest, as far as they can, to inspect their affairs themselves, and to see with their own eyes, ver. 17. Canaan was a rich country, and yet must send to Ophir for gold: the Israelites were a wise and understanding people, and yet must be beholden to the king of Tyre for men that had knowledge of the seas, ver. 18. And yet Canaan was God's peculiar land, and Israel God's peculiar people; which teaches us, that grace, and not gold, is the best riches; and acquaintance with God and his law, not with arts and sciences, the best knowledge.

C H A P. IX.

Solomon here continues to look very great both at home and abroad. We had this account of his grandeur, 1 Kings x. nothing is here added; but his defection towards his latter end, which we have there,

chap. xi. is here omitted; and the close of this chapter brings him to the grave with an unstained reputation. I think, none of the chapters in the Chronicles agree so much with a chapter in the Kings, as this doth with 1 Kings x. verse for verse, only that the two first verses there are put into one here, and ver. 25. here is taken from 1 Kings iv. 26. and the three last verses here from 1 Kings xi. 41—43. Here is, (1.) The honour which the queen of Sheba did to Solomon, in the visit she made him to hear his wisdom, ver. 1—12. (2.) Many instances given of the riches and splendor of Solomon's court, ver. 13—28. (3.) The conclusion of his reign, ver. 29—31.

1. **A**ND when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to prove Solomon, with hard questions at Jerusalem, with a very great company, and camels that bare spices, and gold in abundance, and precious stones; and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. 2. And Solomon told her all her questions: and there was nothing hid from Solomon which he told her not. 3. And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built, 4. And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, his cup-bearers also, and their apparel, and his ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. 5. And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land, of thine acts, and of thy wisdom: 6. Howbeit, I believed not their words, until I came and mine eyes had seen it: and behold, the one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me: for thou exceedest the fame that I heard. 7. Happy are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom. 8. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on his throne, to be king for the LORD thy God: because thy God loved Israel, to establish them for ever, therefore made he thee king over them, to do judgment and justice. 9. And he gave the king an hundred an twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon. 10. And the servants also of Hiram, and the servants of Solomon, which brought gold from Ophir, brought algum-trees, and precious stones. 11. And the king made of the algum-trees terraces to the house of the LORD, and to the king's palace, and harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah. 12. And king Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, besides that which she had brought unto the king: so she turned and went away to her own land, she and her servants.

This passage of story has been largely considered in the Kings, yet because our Saviour has proposed it as an example to us, in our enquiries after him, *Matt. xi. 42.* we must not pass it over without observing briefly,

1. That those that honour God, he will honour, 1 Sam. ii. 30. Solomon had greatly honoured God, in building, beautifying and dedicating the temple; all his wisdom and all his wealth were employed for the making of that a consummate piece; and now God made his wisdom and wealth to redound greatly to his reputation. The way to have both the credit and comfort of all our endowments and all our enjoyments, is to consecrate them to God, and use them for him.

2. That those who know the worth of true wisdom, will grudge no pains or cost to compass it. The queen of Sheba put herself to a great deal of trouble and expence to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and yet learning from him to serve God and do her duty, she thought herself well paid for her pains. Heavenly wisdom is that pearl of great price, which if we part with all for the purchase of, we make a good bargain.

3. That as every man has received the gift, so he ought to minister the same for the education of others, as he has opportunity. Solomon was communicative of his wisdom, and willing to teach others what he knew himself. Being taught of God, freely he had received, and freely he gave. Let them that are rich in wisdom, as well as wealth, learn to do good, and be ready to distribute. Give to every one that asketh.

4. That good order in a family, a great family, especially in the things of God, and a regular discharge of the duties of religious worship, is a very aimable thing, and to be much admired wherever it is found. The queen of Sheba was hugely affected to see the decency with which Solomon's servants attended him, and with which both he and they attended in the house of God. David's ascent to the house of the Lord was a most pleasant thing, *Psal. xlii. 4.*

5. That those are happy, who have the opportunity of a constant converse with such as are knowing, wise and good. The queen of Sheba thought Solomon's servants happy, who continually heard his wisdom, for it seems even to them he was communicative. And it is observable, that the posterity of those that had places in his court, were willing to have the names of their ancestors forgotten, and thought themselves sufficiently distinguished and dignified, when they were called children of Solomon's servants, *Ezra ii. 55. vii. 57.* so eminent were they, it was honour enough to be named from them.

6. We ought to rejoice and give God thanks for the gifts, graces and usefulness of others. The queen of Sheba blessed God for the honour he put upon Solomon, and the favour he did to Israel in advancing him to the throne, ver. 8. By giving God the praise of the prosperity of others, we share in the comfort of it, whereas by envying the prosperity of others, we lose the comfort of our own. The happiness both of king and kingdom she runs up to the fountain of all bliss, the divine favour; it was because thy

God

God delighted in thee, and because he loved Israel. Those mercies are doubly sweet, which we can taste the kindness and good-will of God in as our God.

7. It becomes those that are wise and good to be generous according to their place and power. The queen of Sheba was so to Solomon, Solomon was so to her, ver. 9—12. They both knew how to value wisdom, and therefore were neither of them covetous of their money, but cultivated the acquaintance, and confirmed the friendship they had contracted, by mutual presents. Our Lord Jesus has promised to give us all our desire, *Ask, and it shall be given you.* Let us study what we should render to him, and not think any thing too much to do, or suffer, or part with for him.

13. ¶ Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year, was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold: 14. Besides that which chapmen and merchants brought; and all the kings of Arabia, and governors of the country, brought gold and silver to Solomon. 15. ¶ And king Solomon made two hundred targets of beaten gold: six hundred shekels of beaten gold went to one target. 16. And three hundred shields made he of beaten gold: three hundred shekels of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. 17. ¶ Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. 18. And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on each side of the sitting place, and two lions standing by the stays. 19. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other, upon the six steps. There was not the like made in any kingdom. 20. ¶ And all the drinking vessels of king Solomon were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold: none were of silver; it was not any thing accounted of in the days of Solomon. 21. For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. 22. And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. 23. ¶ And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom that God had put in his heart. 24. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver and vessels of gold, and raiment, harness and spices, horses and mules, a rate year by year. 25. ¶ And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the chariot-cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. 26. ¶ And he reigned over all the kings, from the river, even unto the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt. 27. And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar-trees made he as the fycamore-trees, that are in the low plains in abundance. 28. And they brought unto Solomon horses out of Egypt, and out of all lands. 29. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer, against Jeroboam the son of Nebat? 30. And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. 31. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father, and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead.

We have here Solomon in his throne, and Solomon in his grave, for the throne would not secure him from the grave; *Mors sceptrum ligonibus aequat.*

1. Here is Solomon reigning in wealth and power, in ease and fulness, such as, for aught I know, could never since be paralleled by any king whatsoever. I cannot pretend to be critical in comparing the grandeur of Solomon with that of some of the great princes of the earth, but the most illustrious of them were famed for their wars, whereas Solomon reigned forty years in profound peace. Some of those that might be thought to vie with Solomon, affected retirement, kept people in awe by keeping them at a mighty distance; nobody must see them or come near them upon pain of death: But Solomon went much abroad, and appeared in public business; so that, all things considered, the promise was fulfilled, that God would give him riches, and wealth, and honour, such as no kings have had or shall have, chap. i. 12.

(1.) Never any prince appeared in public with greater splendor than Solomon did, which to those that judge by the sight of the eye, as most people do, would very much recommend him. He had two hundred targets, and three hundred shields, all of beaten gold, carried before him, ver. 15, 16. sat upon a most stately throne, ver. 17, 18, 19. There was not the like in any kingdom: The lustre wherein he appeared, was typical of the spiritual glory of the kingdom of the Messiah, and but a faint representation of his throne, which is above every throne. Solomon's pomp was all artificial, and therefore our Saviour prefers the natural beauty of the lilies of the field before it, Matt. vi. 29. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

(2.) Never any prince had greater plenty of gold and silver, though there was no gold or silver mines in his own kingdom. Either he made himself master of the mines in other countries, and having a populous country, sent hands to dig out those rich metals; or having a fruitful country, he exported the commodities of it, and with them fetched home all this gold that is here spoken of, ver. 13, 14, 21.

(3.) Never any prince had such presents brought him by all his neighbours as Solomon had. All the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought him gold and silver, ver. 14. Not as tribute which he extorted from

them, but as free-will offerings to procure his favour, or in a way of exchange for some of the products of his husbandry, corn, or cattle. All the kings of the earth brought him presents, i. e. all in those parts of the world, ver. 24—28, because they coveted his acquaintance and friendship. Herein he was a type of Christ, to whom as soon as he was born, the wise men of the east brought presents, gold, frankincense and myrrh, Matt. ii. 11. and to whom all that are about him must bring presents, Psal. lxxvi. 11. Rom. xii. 1.

(4.) Never any prince was so renowned for wisdom, so courted, so consulted, so admired, ver. 23. The kings of the earth (for it was too great a favour for common persons to pretend to) sought to hear his wisdom. Either his natural philosophy, or his skill in physic, or his state policy, or his rules of prudence for the conduct of human life, or perhaps the principles of his religion, and the reasons of it. The application which they then made to Solomon to hear his wisdom, will aggravate, shame and condemn men's general contempt of Christ, and his gospel; though in them are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet none of the princes of this world desire to know them, for they are foolishness to them, 1 Cor. ii. 8—14.

2. Here is Solomon's dying; stripped of his pomp, and leaving all his wealth and power, not to one whom he knew not whether he would be a wise man or a fool, Eccles. ii. 19. but who he knew would be a fool: This was not only vanity, but vexation of spirit, ver. 29, 30, 31.

It is very observable, that no mention is here made of Solomon's departure from God in his latter days, not the least hint given of it; (1.) Because the Holy Ghost would teach us not to take delight in repeating the faults and follies of others. If those that have been in reputation for wisdom and honour, miscarry themselves, though it may be of use to take notice of their miscarriages for warning to ourselves and others, yet we must not be forward to mention them; once speaking of them is enough, what needs that unpleasant string be again struck upon? Why can we not do as the sacred historian here doth, speak largely of that in others, which is praiseworthy, without saying any thing of their blemishes, yea, though they have been gross and obvious. This is but doing as we would be done by. (2.) Because, though he fell, yet he was not utterly cast down: Therefore his sin is not again recorded, because it was repented of and pardoned, and so became as if he had never been. Scripture silence sometimes speaks: I am willing to believe, that its silence here concerning the sin of Solomon, is an intimation that none of the sins he committed were mentioned against him, Ezek. xxxiii. 16. When God pardons sin, he casts it behind his back, and remembers it no more.

C H A P. X.

This chapter is copied almost verbatim from 1 Kings. xii. 1—19. where it was opened at large. Solomon's defection from God was not repeated, but the defection of the ten tribes from his family is in this chapter, where we find, (1.) How foolish Rehoboam was in his treating with them, ver. 1, 5—15. (2.) How wicked the people were in complaining of Solomon, ver. 2, 3, 4. and forsaking Rehoboam, ver. 16—19. (3.) How just and righteous God was in all this, ver. 15. his counsel was thereby fulfilled. With him is strength and wisdom, both the deceived and the deceiver (the fool and the knave) are his, Job xii. 16. i. e. are made use of by him, to serve his purposes.

1. **A**ND Rehoboam went to Shechem: for to Shechem were all Israel come to make him king. 2. And it came to pass when Jeroboam the son of Nebat (who was in Egypt, whither he had fled from the presence of Solomon the king) heard it, that Jeroboam returned out of Egypt. 3. And they sent and called him: so Jeroboam and all Israel came and spake to Rehoboam, saying. 4. Thy father made our yoke grievous, now therefore ease thou somewhat the grievous servitude of thy father, and his heavy yoke that he put upon us, and we will serve thee. 5. And he said unto them, Come again unto me after three days. And the people departed. 6. ¶ And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men that had stood before Solomon his father, while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me, to return answer to this people? 7. And they spake unto him saying, If thou be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be thy servants for ever. 8. But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him. 9. And he said unto them, What advice give ye, that we may return answer to this people, which have spoken to me, saying, Ease somewhat the yoke that thy father did put upon us? 10. And the young men that were brought up with him, spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou answer the people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it somewhat lighter for us: thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. 11. For whereas my father put a heavy yoke upon you, I will put more to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

We may observe here,

1. That the wisest and best cannot give every body content. Solomon enriched and advanced his kingdom, did all (one would think) that could be done to make them happy and easy; and yet either he was indifferent in burdening them with the imposition of taxes and services, or at least there was some colour of reason to think him so. No man is perfectly wise. It is probable it was when Solomon had declined from God and his duty, that his wisdom failed him, and God left him to himself to act thus impolitely. Even Solomon's treasures were exhausted by his love of women; and it is probable it was to maintain them, and their pride, luxury, and idolatry, that he squeezed his subjects.

2. That

2. That turbulent and ungrateful spirits will find fault with the government, and complain of grievances, when they have very little reason to do so. Had they not peace in Solomon's time? Never plundered by invaders, as formerly, never put in fear by the alarms of war, nor obliged to jeopard their lives in the high places of the field. Had they not plenty of Meat enough, and money enough, what would they more? *O fortunati nimium, bona sibi sua norunt!* And yet they complain, that Solomon made their yoke grievous. If any complain thus of the yoke of Christ, that they may have a pretence to break his bands in sunder, and cast away his cords from them, we are sure he never gave them any cause at all for the complaint, whatever Solomon did. His yoke is easy, and his burden light. He never made us serve with an offering, nor wearied us with iniquity.

3. That many ruin themselves and their interests, by trampling upon, and provoking their inferiors; Rehoboam thought, because he was king, he could king it as well as his father had done, have what he would, and do what he would, and carry all before him; but though he wore his father's crown, he wanted his father's head-piece, and ought to have considered, that being another man from what his father was, he ought to take other measures; such a wise man as Solomon may do as he will, but such a fool as Rehoboam must do as he can. The high mettled horse may be kicked and spurred by him that has the art of managing him, but if an unskillful horse-man do it, it is at his peril. Rehoboam paid dear for threatening and talking big, and thinking to carry it with a high hand. It was Job's wisdom as well as his virtue, that he *despised not the counsel of his man-servant, or maid-servant*, when they argued with him, *Job xxxi. 13.* but heard them patiently, considered their reasons, and gave them a soft answer: And the like tender consideration of those in subjection, and a forwardness to make them easy, will be the comfort and praise of all in authority, in church, state, and families.

4. That moderate counsels are generally wisest and best. Gentleness will do what violence will not do; most people love to be spoken fair. Rehoboam's old experienced counsellors directed him to this method, *ver. 7. Be kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, and thou art sure of them for ever.* Good words cost nothing but a little self-denial, and yet they purchase great things.

5. That God fulfils the counsels of his own wisdom oftentimes by insinuating men, and giving them up to the counsels of their own folly. No more needs be done to ruin men, than to leave them to themselves, and their own pride and passion.

12. So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come again to me on the third day. 13. And the king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the counsel of the old men. 14. And answered them after the advice of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add thereto: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 15. So the king hearkened not unto the people, for the cause was of God, that the LORD might perform his word which he spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 16. ¶ And when all Israel saw that the king would not hearken unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? and we have none inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to your tents, O Israel: and now, David, see to thine own house. So all Israel went to their tents. 17. But as for the children of Israel that dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18. Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram that was over the tribute, and the children of Israel stoned him with stones, that he died: but king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. 19. And Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

We may learn here,

1. That when public affairs are in a ferment, violent proceedings do but make ill worse. Rough answers (such as Rehoboam here gave) do but stir up anger, and bring oil to the flames. The pilot has need to steer steady in a storm. Many have been driven to the mischief they did not intend, by being too severely dealt with for what they did intend.

2. That whatever the devices and designs of men are, God is by all doing his own work, and fulfilling the work which he has spoken, not one jot or tittle of which shall fall to the ground. The cause of the king's wilfulness and incogitancy was God, that he might perform the word which he spake by Ahijah, *ver. 15.* This does not at all excuse Rehoboam's folly, nor lessen the guilt of his haughtiness and passion, that God was pleased to serve his own ends by it.

3. That worldly wealth, honour and dominion, are very uncertain things. Solomon reigned over all Israel, and one would think had done enough to secure the monarchy intire to his family for many ages, and yet he is scarce cold in his grave, before ten of the twelve tribes finally revolt from his son. All the good services he had done for Israel are now forgotten, *What portion have we in David?* Thus is the government of Christ cast off by many, notwithstanding all he hath done to oblige the children of men for ever to himself; they say, *We will not have this man to reign over us.* But their rebellion will certainly be their ruin.

4. That God often visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. Solomon forsakes God, and therefore not he but his son after him is forsaken by the greatest part of his people. Thus God, by making the penal consequences of his sin to last long, and visibly to continue after the sinner's death, would give an indication of its malignity, and perhaps some intimation of the perpetuity of its punishment. He that sins against God, not only wrongs his soul, but perhaps wrongs his seed more than he thinks of.

5. That when God is fulfilling his threatenings, he will take care that at the same time his promises do not fall to the ground. When Solomon's iniquity is remembered, and for it his son loseth ten tribes, David's piety is not forgotten, nor the promise made to him, but for the sake of that his grand-son had two tribes preserved to him. The failings of the faints shall not frustrate any promise made to Christ their head. They shall be chastised, but the covenant not broken, *Psal. lxxxix. 33.*

No. LXII*.

We are here going on with the history of Rehoboam. (1.) His attempt to recover the ten tribes he had lost, and the letting fall of that attempt, in obedience to the divine command, *ver. 1—4.* (2.) His successful endeavours to preserve the two tribes that remained, *ver. 5—12.* (3.) The resort of the priests and Levites to him, *ver. 13—17.* (4.) An account of his wives and children, *ver. 18—23.*

1. AND when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. 2. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 3. Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 4. Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house, for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam. 5. ¶ And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah. 6. He built even Beth-lehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, 7. And Beth-zur, and Shocq, and Adullum, 8. And Gath, and Marreshah, and Ziph, 9. And Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah, 10. And Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah, and in Benjamin, fenced cities. 11. And he fortified the strong-holds, and put captains in them, and store of victuals, and of oil and wine. 12. And in every several city he put shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side.

How the ten tribes deserted the house of David, we read in the foregoing chapter; they had formerly sat loose to that family, *1 Sam. xx. 1, 2.* and now they quite threw it off; not considering how much it would weaken the common interest, and take Israel down from the pitch of glory, to which it was arrived in the last reign. But thus the kingdom must be corrected as well as the house of David.

1. Rehoboam at length, like a bold man, raises an army, with a design to reduce the revolted, *ver. 1.* Judah and Benjamin were not only resolved to continue their allegiance to him, but ready to give him the best assistance they could for the recovery of his right. Judah was his own tribe, that owned him some years before the rest did; Benjamin was the tribe in which Jerusalem or the greatest part of it stood, which perhaps was one reason why that tribe clave to him.

2. Yet like a conscientious man, when God forbid him to prosecute this design, in obedience to him he let it fall; either because he revered the divine authority, or because he knew he should not prosper if he should go contrary to God's command, but instead of retrieving what was lost, would be in danger of losing what he had. It is dangerous undertaking any thing, but especially undertaking a war contrary to the will of God. God calls him, *ver. 3. Rehoboam the son of Solomon*, to intimate this was determined for the sin of Solomon, and it would be to no purpose to oppose a decree that was gone forth. They obeyed the words of the Lord, and though it looked mean, and would turn to their reproach among their neighbours, yet because God would have it so, they laid down their arms.

3. Like a discreet man he fortified his own country. He saw it was to no purpose to think of reducing those that were revolted; a few good words might have prevented their defection, but now all the forces of his kingdom cannot bring them back; the thing is done, and so it must rest, it is his wisdom to make the best of it. Perhaps the same young counsellors that had advised him to answer them roughly, urged him to fight them, notwithstanding the divine inhibition, but he had paid dear enough for being advised by them, and therefore now we may suppose his aged and experienced counsellors were hearkened to, and they advised him to submit to the will of God concerning what was lost, but to make it his business to keep what he had. It is probable it was by their advice that, (1.) He fortified his frontiers, and many of the principal cities of his kingdom, which in Solomon's peaceable reign no care had been taken for the defence of. (2.) He furnished them with good store of victuals and arms, *ver. 11, 12.* Because God forbid him to fight, he did not therefore sit down tullen, and say he would do nothing for the public safety, if he might not do that; but prudently provided against an attack. They that may not be conquerors yet may be builders.

13. ¶ And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel, resorted to him out of all their coasts. 14. (For the Levites left their suburbs, and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priests' office unto the LORD, 15. And he ordained him priests for the high-places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.) 16. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel, came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers. 17. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon. 18. ¶ And Rehoboam took him Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David to wife, and Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse: 19. Which bare him children; Jeush, and Shemariah, and Zerah. 20. And after her, he took Maachah the daughter of Absalom, which bare him Abijah, and Attai, and

Ziza, and Shelomith. 21. And Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Abshalom above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and threescore concubines, and begat twenty and eight sons and threescore daughters.) 22. And Rehoboam made Abijah the son of Maachah the chief, to be ruler among his brethren: for he thought to make him king. 23. And he dealt wisely, and dispersed of all his children throughout all the countries of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city: and he gave them victual in abundance: and he desired many wives.

See here, 1. How Rehoboam was strengthened by the accession of the priests and Levites, and all the devout and pious Israelites to him; even all that were true to their God, and their religion.

1. Jeroboam cast them off; i. e. He set up such a way of worship as he knew they could not in conscience comply with, which obliged them to withdraw from his altar, and at the same time he would not allow them to go up to Jerusalem to worship at the altar there; so that he totally cast them off from executing the priest's office, ver. 14. And very willing he was they should turn themselves out of their places; that room might be made for those scandalous paltry fellows which he ordained priests for the high places, ver. 15. Compare 1 Kings xii. 31. No marvel if he that cast off God, cast off his ministers; they were not for his purpose, would not do what-ever he bid them do, would not serve his God, nor worship the golden image which he had set up.

2. They thereupon left their suburbs and possessions, ver. 14. Out of the lot of each tribe, the Levites had cities allowed them, where they were comfortably provided for, and had opportunity of doing much good. But now they were driven out of all their cities, except those in Judah and Benjamin: one would think their maintenance well settled, and yet they lost it. It was a comfort to them, that the law so often told them the Lord was their inheritance; and so they should find him, when they were turned out of their house and harbour. But why did they leave their possessions? (1.) Because they saw they could do no good among their neighbours, in whom, now Jeroboam set up his calves, the old proneness to idolatry revived. (2.) Because they themselves would be in continual temptation, to some base compliances, and in danger of being drawn insensibly to that which was evil. If we pray in sincerity not to be led into temptation, we will get and keep as fast as we can out of the way of it. (3.) Because if they retained their integrity, they had reason to expect persecution from Jeroboam and his sons: The priests they made for the devils, would not let the Lord's priests be long among them. No secular advantages whatsoever should draw us thither, or detain us there, where we are in danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

3. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, ver. 14. and presented themselves to Rehoboam, ver. 13. marg. Where should God's priests and Levites be, but where his altar was? Thither they came, because it was their business to attend at the times appointed. (1.) It was a mercy to them that they had a place of refuge to flee to, and that when Jeroboam cast them off, there were those so near that would entertain them and bid them welcome, and they were not forced into the lands of the heathen. (2.) It was an evidence they loved their work better than their maintenance, in that they left their suburbs and possessions in the country, where they might have lived at ease upon their own, because they were restrained from serving God there, and cast themselves upon God's providence and the charity of their brethren, to come there where they might have the free enjoyment of God's ordinances, according to his institution. Poverty in the way of duty is to be chosen rather than plenty in the way of sin. Better live upon alms, or die in a prison with a good conscience, than roll in wealth and pleasure with a prostituted one. (3.) It was the wisdom and praise of Rehoboam and his people, that they bid him welcome, though they crowded themselves perhaps to make room for them. Conscientious refugees will bring a blessing along with them to the countries that entertain them, as they have a curse behind them with those that expel them. *Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keepeth truth may enter in; it will be good policy: see Jsa. xxvi. 1, 2.*

4. When the priests and Levites came to Jerusalem, all the devout pious Israelites of every tribe followed them; such as *set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel*, that made conscience of their duty to God, and were sincere and resolute in it, they left the inheritance of their fathers, and went and took houses in Jerusalem, that they might have free access to the altar of God, and be out of the temptation to worship the calves, ver. 16. Note, 1. That is best for us that is best for our souls; and, in all our choices, advantages for religion must take place of all outward conveniences. 2. Where God's faithful priests are, his faithful people should be. If Jeroboam cast off God's ministers, every true-born Israelite will think himself obliged to own them and stand by them. *For sake not the Levite, the out-cast Levite, as long as thou livest.* When the ark removes, do you remove and go after it, Josh. iii. 3.

5. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, ver. 17. not only by the addition of so many persons to it, who, it is likely, brought what they could of their effects with them, but by their piety and their prayers they procured a blessing upon the kingdom which was a sanctuary to them; see Zech. xii. 5. It is the interest of a nation to protect and encourage religion and religious people, and adds more than any thing to its strength. They made him and his people strong three years; for so long as they walked in the way of David and Solomon, their good way; but when they forsook that, and so threw themselves out of God's favour and protection, the best friends they had could no longer help to strengthen them. We retain our strength while we stick to God and our duty, and no longer.

2. How Rehoboam was weakened by indulging himself in his pleasures. He desired many wives, as his father did, ver. 23. yet, (1.) In this he was more wise than his father, - that for aught appears he did not marry with strange wives; the wives that are mentioned here were not only daughters of Israel, but of the family of David; one was a descendant from Eliab, David's brother, ver. 18. another from Abshalom (that Abshalom, it is supposed, who was) David's son, ver. 20. another of Jeremoth David's son. (2.) In this he was more happy than his father, that he had many sons and daughters; whereas we read not of more than one son that his father had. One can scarce imagine he had no more; but no more that were worth mentioning, whereas several of Rehoboam's sons are here named, ver. 19. 20. as men of note, and such active men, that he thought it his wisdom to disperse them throughout the countries of Judah and Benjamin, ver. 23. either, (1.) That they might not be rivals with his son Abijah, whom he designed for his successor: or rather, (2.) Because he could repose a confidence in them, for the preserving of the public peace and safety, could trust them with the fenced cities, which he took care to have well victualled, that they might stand him in stead in case of an invasion. Thus he that dealt

foolishly at first, dealt wisely afterwards in his affairs. After-wisdom is better than none at all; nay, they say, "Wit is never good till it is bought." Though his was dear bought with the loss of a kingdom.

CHAP. XII.

This chapter gives us a more full account of the reign of Rehoboam than we had before in Kings, and it is a very melancholy account; methinks we are in the book of Judges again; for, (1.) Rehoboam and his people did evil in the sight of the Lord, ver. 1. (2.) God thereupon sold them, into the hands of Shishak king of Egypt, who greatly oppressed them, ver. 2-4. (3.) God sent a prophet to them, to expound to them the judgment, and to call them to repentance, ver. 5. (4.) They thereupon humbled themselves, ver. 6. (5.) God upon their repentance turned from his anger, ver. 7. 12. and yet left them under the marks of his displeasure, ver. 8-11. Lastly, Here is a general character of Rehoboam and his reign, with the conclusion of it, ver. 13-16.

1. **AND** it came to pass when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him. 2. And it came to pass that in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem (because they had transgressed against the LORD,) 3. With twelve hundred chariots, and threescore thousand horsemen: and the people were without number that came with him out of Egypt; the Lubims, and Sukkiims, and the Ethiopians. 4. And he took the fenced cities which pertained to Judah, and came to Jerusalem. 5. ¶ Then came Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam, and to the princes of Judah that were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Ye have forsaken me, and therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak. 6. Whereupon the princes of Israel, and the king humbled themselves, and they said, The LORD is righteous. 7. And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves, therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. 8. Nevertheless, they shall be his servants; that they may know my service; and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. 9. So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, he took all: he carried away also the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 10. Instead of which king Rehoboam made shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the chief of the guard, that kept the entrance of the king's house. 11. And when the king entered into the house of the LORD, the guard came and fetched them, and brought them again into the guard-chamber. 12. And when he humbled himself, the wrath of the LORD turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether: and also in Judah things went well.

Israel was very much disgraced and weakened by being divided into two kingdoms; yet the kingdom of Judah having both the temple and the royal city, both of the house of David and the house of Aaron, might have done very well if they had continued in the way of their duty; but here we have all out of order there.

1. Rehoboam and his people left God. He forsook the law of the Lord, and so in effect forsook God, and all Israel with him, ver. 1. He had his happy triennium, when he walked in the way of David and Solomon, chap. xi. 17. but it expired, and he grew remiss in the worship of God; in what instances we are not told, but he fell off, and Judah with him here called Israel, because they walked in the evil ways which Jeroboam had drawn the kingdom of Israel into. This he did when he had established the kingdom, and strengthened himself; as long as he thought his throne tottered, he kept to his duty, that he might make God his friend; but when he found it stood pretty firm, he thought he had no more occasion for religion, he was safe enough without it; thus the prosperity of fools destroys them. *Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.* When men prosper and are in no apprehension of troubles, they are ready to say to God, Depart from us.

2. God presently brought trouble upon them, to awaken them, and recover them to repentance before their hearts were hardened. It was but in the fourth year of Rehoboam, that they began to corrupt themselves, and in the fifth year the king of Egypt came up against them with a vast army, took the fenced cities of Judah, and came up against Jerusalem, ver. 2, 3, 4. This great calamity coming upon them so soon after they began to desert the worship of God, by a hand they had little reason to suspect, having had a great deal of friendly correspondence with Egypt in the last reign, and coming with so much violence, that all the fenced cities of Judah, which Rehoboam had lately fortified and garrisoned, and on which he relied much for the safety of his kingdom, presently fell into the hands of the enemy without making any resistance, plainly shewed that it was of the Lord, because they had transgressed against him.

3. Left they should not readily, or not rightly understand the meaning of this providence, God by the word explains the rod, ver. 5. When the princes of Judah were all met at Jerusalem, probably in a great council of war, to concert measures for their own safety in this critical juncture, he sent a prophet to them, the same that had brought them an injunction from God not to fight against the ten tribes, chap. xi. 2. Shemaiah by name, and he told them plainly the reason why Shishak prevailed against them, was not because they had been impolitic in the management of their affairs, which

which perhaps the princes in the congress were enquiring into the instances of, but because they had forsaken God. God never leaves any, till they first leave him.

4. The rebukes both of the word and of the rod being thus joined, the king and princes thus humbled themselves before God for their iniquity, penitentially acknowledged the sin, and patiently accepted the punishment of it, saying, *The Lord is righteous*, ver. 6. we have none to blame but ourselves; let God be clear when he judgeth. Thus it becomes us when we are under the rebukes of providence to justify God, and judge ourselves; even kings and princes must either bend or break before God; either be humbled, or be ruined.

5. Upon the profession they made of repentance, God shewed them some favour, saved them from ruin, and yet left them under some remaining fears of the judgment, to prevent their revolt again.

1. God in mercy prevented the destruction they were now upon the brink of. Such a vast and now victorious army as Shishak had, having made themselves masters of all the fenced cities, what other could be expected but that the whole country, and even Jerusalem itself, would in a little time be theirs? But when God saith, *Here shall the proud waves be stayed*; the most threatening force strangely dwindles and becomes impotent: Here again the destroying angel, when he comes to Jerusalem is forbidden to destroy that; *my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem*, not at this time, nor by this hand, not utterly to destroy it, ver. 7, 12. Note, Those that acknowledge God righteous in afflicting them, shall find him gracious. They that humble themselves before him shall find favour with him. So ready is the God of mercy to take the first occasion to shew mercy. If we have humbled hearts under humbling providences, the affliction has done its work, and it shall either be removed, or the property of it altered.

2. He granted them some deliverance; not complete, but in part, gave them some advantages against the enemy, so that they recruited a little. *Gave them deliverance for a little while*, so some. They reformed but partially, and for a little while, soon relapsing again, and as their reformation was, so was their deliverance. Yet it is said, ver. 12. *In Judah things went well*, and began to look with a better face, (1.) In respect of piety; there were good things in Judah, so it is in the margin. Good ministers, good people, good families, who were made better by the calamities of their country. Note, In times of great corruption and degeneracy, it is some comfort if there be a remnant among whom good things are found, and that is ground of hope to Israel. (2.) In respect of prosperity; in Judah things went ill, when all the fenced cities were taken, ver. 4 but when they repented, the posture of their affairs altered, and things went well. Note, Things do not go so well as we could wish, yet we have reason to take notice of it with thankfulness, if they go better than likely, better than they have gone, or better than we expected or deserved, and to God's goodness if he do but grant us some deliverance.

3. Yet he left them to smart sorely by the hand of Shishak, both in their liberty, and in their wealth. (1.) In their liberty, ver. 8. *They shall be his servants*, i. e. they shall lie much at his mercy, and be put under contribution by him, and some of them, perhaps, be taken prisoners, and held in captivity by him, *that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries*. They complained, it may be of the strictness of their religion, and therefore *forsook the law of the Lord*, ver. 1. because they thought it a yoke too hard and too heavy upon them: Well, saith God, let them mend their service if they can; let the neighbouring princes rule them awhile, since they are not willing I should rule them, and let them try how they like that; they might have served God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, and would not; let them serve their enemies then in hunger and thirst, Deut. xxviii. 47, 48, till they think of returning to their first master, for then it was better with them, Hos. ii. 7. This, some think is the meaning of that, *Ezek. xx. 24, 25. Because they despised my statutes, I gave them statutes that were not good*. Note, 1. The more God's service is compared with other services, the more easy and reasonable it will appear. 2. Whatever difficulties or hardships we may imagine there are in the way of obedience, it is better a thousand times to go through them, than to expose ourselves to the punishments of disobedience. Are the laws of temperance thought hard? The effects of intemperance will be much harder. The service of virtue is perfect liberty; the service of lust is perfect slavery.

(2.) In their wealth. The king of Egypt plundered both the temple and the exchequer, the treasures of both which Solomon left very full, but he took them away, yea, he took all, all he could lay his hands on, ver. 9. That was it he came for. David and Solomon, that walked in the way of God, filled the treasuries, one by war, and the other by merchandize, but Rehoboam, that forsook the law of God, emptied them. The taking away of the golden shields, and the substituting of brazen ones in their place, ver. 9, 10, 11. we had an account of before, 1 Kings xiv. 25, 26, 27, 28.

13. ¶ So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned: for Rehoboam was one and forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there: and his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess. 14. And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD. 15. Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies? And there were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. 16. And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David; and Abijah his son reigned in his stead.

The story of Rehoboam's reign is here concluded, much as the story of the other reigns concludes. Two things especially are observable here,

1. That he was at length pretty well fixed in his kingdom, ver. 13. His fenced cities in Judah did not answer his expectation, so he now strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and made it his business to fortify that; and there he reigned seventeen years, the city which the Lord hath chosen to put his name there. This speaks his honour and privilege, that he had his royal seat in the holy city, which yet was but an aggravation of his impiety; near the temple, but far from God. Frequent skirmishes there were between his subjects and Jeroboam's, such as amounted to continual wars, ver. 15. but he held his own and reigned, and as it should seem, did not so grossly forsake the law of God as he had done, ver. 1. in his fourth year.

2. That he was never rightly fixed in his religion, ver. 14. he never quite cast off God; and yet in this he did evil, that he prepared not, he engaged

not his heart to seek the Lord. See what the fault is laid upon; 1. He did not serve the Lord, because he did not seek the Lord; he did not pray, as Solomon did, for wisdom and grace: would we pray better, we should be every way better. Or he did not consult the word of God, did not seek to that as his oracle, nor take directions from that. 2. He made nothing of his religion, because he did not set his heart to it; never minded it with any closeness of application, had never any hearty disposition to it, nor ever came up to a steady resolution in it. What little goodness he had, it passed away like the morning cloud. And therefore he did evil, because he was never determined for that which was good. Those are easily drawn by Satan to any evil, who are wavering and inconstant in that which is good, and are never persuaded to make religion their business.

C H A P. XIII.

We have here a much fuller account of the reign of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam, than we had in the Kings. There we found that his character was no better than his father's, he walked in the sins of his father, and his heart was not right with God, 1 Kings xv. 2, 3. But here we find him more brave and successful in war than his father was. He reigned but three years, and was chiefly famous for a glorious victory he obtained over the forces of Jeroboam. Here is, (1.) The armies brought into the field on both sides, ver. 3. (2.) The remonstrance which Abijah made before the battle, setting forth the justice of his cause, ver. 4—12. (3.) The distress which Judah was brought into by the policy of Jeroboam, ver. 13, 14. (4.) The victory they obtained, notwithstanding, by the power of God, ver. 15—20. (5.) The conclusion of Abijah's reign, ver. 21, 22.

1. NOW in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah. 2. He reigned three years in Jerusalem: (his mother's name also was Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah) and there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3. And Abijah set the battle in array, with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men: Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with eight hundred thousand chosen men, being mighty men of valour. 4. ¶ And Abijah stood upon mount Zemaraim, which is in mount Ephraim, and said, Hear me, thou Jeroboam, and all Israel, 5. Ought you not to know, that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt? 6. Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, is risen up, and hath rebelled against his lord. 7. And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tender-hearted, and could not withstand them. 8. And now ye think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD in the hand of the sons of David; and ye be a great multitude, and there are with you golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods. 9. Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods. 10. But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the priests which minister unto the LORD are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business. 11. And they burn unto the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shew-bread also set they in order upon the pure table, and the candle-stick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of the LORD our God? but ye have forsaken him. 12. And behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the LORD God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper.

Abijah's mother was called Maachah, the daughter of Abiailom, chap. xi. 20. here she is called Michaiah, the daughter of Uriel. It is most probable, she was a grand-daughter of Abiailom, by his daughter Tamar, 2 Sam. xiv. 27. and that her immediate father was Uriel. But we are here to attend Abijah into the field of battle with Jeroboam king of Israel.

1. God gave him leave to engage with Jeroboam, and owned him in it, though he would not permit Rehoboam to do it, chap. xi. 4. (1.) Jeroboam, it is probable, was now the aggressor, and what Abijah did was in his own necessary defence; Jeroboam, it may be, happening to survive Rehoboam, claimed the crown of Judah by survivorship, at least hoped to get it from this young king upon his first accession to the throne: against these impudent pretensions, it was bravely done of Abijah to take up arms, and God stood by him. (2.) When Rehoboam attempted to recover his ten tribes, Jeroboam was upon his good behaviour, and there must be some trial of him; but now he had discovered what manner of man he was, by setting up the calves, and casting off the priests. Abijah is allowed to chastise him; and it doth not appear that he intended any more, whereas Rehoboam aimed at no less than the reducing of the ten tribes, which was contrary to the counsel of God.

2. Jeroboam's army was double in number to that of Abijah; ver. 3. for he had ten tribes to raise an army out of, Abijah had but two. Of both sides

sides it is said they were mighty men, chosen men, and valiant; but the army of Judah consisted of four hundred thousand, Jeroboam's army of eight hundred thousand. Yet the inferior number proves victorious; for the battle is not always to the strong, nor the cause to the majority.

3. Abijah, before he fought them, reasoned with them to persuade them, though not to return to the house of David, that matter was settled by the divine determination, and he acquiesced, yet to desist from fighting against the house of David. He would not have them *withstand the kingdom of the Lord in the hands of the sons of David*, ver. 8. but at least to be content with what they had. Note, It is good to try reason before we use force. If the point may be gained by dint of argument, better so than by dint of sword. We must never fly to violent methods till all the arts of persuasion have been tried in vain. War must be the *ratio ultima regum*, the last refuge of injured right. Fair reasoning may do a great deal of good, and prevent a great deal of mischief: *How forcible are right words!* Abijah was got with his army into the heart of their country, for he made this speech upon a hill in mount Ephraim, where he might be heard by Jeroboam and the principal officers, with whom, it is probable, he desired to have a treaty, which they consented to. It has been usual for great generals to make speeches to their own soldiers to animate them, and this speech of Abijah had a tendency that way, but was directed to Jeroboam and all Israel.

Two things Abijah undertakes to make out for the satisfaction of his own men, and the conviction of the enemy.

1. That he had right on his side, a *jus divinum*, an indisputable right; you know, or ought to know, that God gave the kingdom to David and his sons for ever, ver. 5. not by common providence, his usual way of disposing of kingdoms, but by a covenant of salt, a lasting covenant, a covenant made by sacrifice, which was always salted; so Bishop Patrick. All Israel had owned that David was a king of God's making, and that God had entailed the crown upon his family; so that Jeroboam taking the crown of Israel at all was not justifiable, yet it is not certain he relies chiefly to that, for he knew Jeroboam had a grant from God of the ten tribes; but, however, his attempt now to disturb the peace and possession of the king of Judah was by no means excusable; for when the ten tribes were given him, two were reserved for the house of David. He shews, (1.) That there was a great deal of dishonesty and dissimulation in his first setting up of himself. He rebelled against his lord, who had preferred him, 1 Kings xi. 28. and basely took advantage of Rehoboam's weakness in a critical juncture, when in gratitude to his old master, and in justice to his title, he ought rather to have stood by him, and helped to secure the people in their allegiance to him; than to head a party against him, and make a prey of him, which was unworthily done, and what he could not expect to prosper in. They that supported him, he calls vain men, (a character perhaps borrowed from Judg. xi. 3.) men that did not act from any steady principle, but were given to change, and men of Belial, that were for shaking off the yoke of government, and setting those over them that would do just as they would have them do. (2.) That there was a great deal of impiety in his present attempt; for in fighting against the house of David, he fought against the kingdom of the Lord. They that oppose right, oppose the righteous God, that sits in the throne judging right, and cannot promise themselves success in so doing. Right may indeed go by the worst for a time; but it will prevail at last.

2. That he had God on his side. This he insists much upon, that the religion of Jeroboam and his army was false and idolatrous; but for his part, he and his people, the men of Judah, had the pure worship of the true and living God among them. It appears by Abijah's character, 1 Kings xv. 3. that he was not himself truly religious, and yet here he encourages himself in this war chiefly from the religion of his kingdom; for, (1.) Whatever he was otherwise, it should seem he was no idolater; or, if he connived at the high places and images, chap. xiv. 3—5. yet he constantly kept up the temple-service. (2.) Whatever corruptions there were in the kingdom of Judah, the state of religion among them was better than in the kingdom of Israel, with which they were now contending. (3.) It is common for those that deny the power of godliness, to boast of the form of it. (4.) It was the cause of his kingdom that he was pleading, and though he was not himself so good as he should be, yet he hoped that for the sake of the good men and good things that were in Judah, God would now appear for them. Many that have little religion themselves, yet have so much sense and grace as to value it in others. See how he describes,

1. The apostacy of Israel from God. *You are a great multitude*, saith he, far superior to us in numbers, but we need not fear you, for you have that among yourselves, that is enough to ruin you, for, (1.) You have calves for your gods, ver. 8. that are unable to protect and help you, and will certainly engage the true and living God against you. Those will be Achans, troublers of your camp. (2.) You have cast off the tribe of Levi, and the house of Aaron, whom God appointed to minister in holy things, and in conformity to the custom of the idolatrous nations, make any man a priest that has a mind to the office, and will be at the charge of the consecration though never so much a scoundrel to the character. Yet such, though very unfit to be priests, were fittest of all to be their priests; for what more agreeable to gods that were no gods, than priests that were no priests? Like to like, both pretenders and usurpers.

2. The adherence of Judah to God. *But as for us*, (ver. 10) *we have not forsaken God*. Jehovah is our God, the God of our fathers, the God of Israel, who is able to protect us, and give us success; he is with us, for we are with him: (1.) At home in his temple, we keep his charge, ver. 10, 11. we worship no images, have no priests but what he has ordained, no rites of worship but what he has prescribed: both the temple-service and the temple-furniture are of his appointing; his appointment we abide by, and neither add nor diminish. These we have the comfort of, these we now stand up in the defence of; so that upon a religious, as well as a civil account, we have the better cause. (2.) Here in the camp, he is our captain, and we may therefore be sure that he is with us, because we are with him, ver. 12. And as a token of his presence, we have here with us his priests, sounding his trumpets according to the law, as a testimony against you, and an assurance to us, that in the day of battle we shall be remembered before the Lord our God, and saved from our enemies; for so this sacred signal is explained, Numb. x. 9. Nothing more effectual to embolden men, and put spirit into them, than to be sure that God is with them, and fighteth for them. He concludes with fair warning to his enemies. *Fight not against the God of your fathers*; It is folly to fight against the God of almighty power; but it is treachery and base ingratitude, to fight against your father's God, and you cannot expect to prosper.

13. ¶ But Jeroboam caused an ambushment to come about behind them; so they were before Judah, and the ambushment was behind them. 14. And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priests

founded with the trumpets. 15. Then the men of Judah gave a shout: and as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass that God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16. And the children of Israel fled before Judah: and God delivered them into their hand. 17. And Abijah and his people slew them with a great slaughter: so there fell down slain of Israel, five hundred thousand chosen men. 18. Thus the children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers. 19. And Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him, Beth-el with the towns thereof, and Jeshanah with the towns thereof, and Ephraim with the towns thereof. 20. Neither did Jeroboam recover strength again in the days of Abijah: And the LORD struck him and he died. 21. ¶ But Abijah waxed mighty, and married fourteen wives, and begat twenty and two sons, and sixteen daughters. 22. And the rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways, and his sayings, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

We do not find that Jeroboam offered to make any answer at all to Abijah's speech, though it was much to the purpose, he resolved not to heed it, and therefore took on him not to hear it; he came to fight, not to dispute; the longest sword he thinks will determine the matter, not the better cause: Let us therefore see the issue, whether right and religion carry the day or no.

1. Jeroboam that trusted to his politics was beaten. He was so far from fair reasoning, that he was not for fair fighting; we may suppose he laughed in his sleeve at Abijah's harangue. One stratagem, thinks he, is worth twenty such speeches, we will give him an answer presently to all his arguments, he shall soon find himself overpowered with numbers, surrounded on every side with the instruments of death, and then let him boast of his religion and his title to the crown. It is probable a parley was agreed on, yet Jeroboam basely takes the advantage of it, and while he was treating, laid his ambushment behind them, against all the laws of arms. What honour could he expect in a servant when he reigned? Abijah was for peace, but *when he spoke, they were for war*, Plal. cxx. 7.

2. Abijah and his people that trusted in their God came off conquerors, notwithstanding the disproportion of their strength and numbers.

(1.) They were brought into a great strait, put into a great fright, for the battle was before and behind: A good cause, and which is designed to be victorious, may be in distress, and at a plunge. It was David's case, *They compassed me about like bees*, Plal. cxviii. 10, 11, 12.

(2.) In their distress, when danger was on every side, which way should they look but upwards for deliverance? and an unspeakable comfort it is that no enemy, not the most powerful or politic, no stratagem or ambushment can cut off our communication with heaven; our way thitherward is always open. (1.) *They cried unto the Lord*, ver. 14. We hope they did that before they engaged in this war, but the distress they were in made them renew their prayers, and quickened them to be importunate. God brings his people into straits, that he may teach them to cry unto him. Earnest praying is crying. (2.) *They relied on the God of their fathers*, depended upon his power to help them, and committed themselves to him, ver. 18. The prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer, and this is that by which we overcome the world, *even our faith*, 1 John v. 4. (3.) *The priests founded the trumpets* to animate them by giving them an assurance of God's presence with them. It was not only a martial but a sacred sound, and put life into their faith. (4.) They shouted in confidence of victory, the day is our own, for God is with us. To the cry of prayer they added the shout of faith, and so became more than conquerors.

(3.) Thus they obtained a complete victory. *As the men of Judah shouted for joy in God's salvation*, God smote Jeroboam and his army with such terror and amazement that they could not strike a stroke, but fled with the greatest precipitation imaginable, and the conquerors gave no quarter, so that they put to the sword five hundred thousand chosen men, ver. 17. more (they say) than ever we read of in any history to have been killed in one battle; but the battle was the Lord's, who would thus chastise the idolatry of Israel, and own the house of David. But see the sad effect of division: It was the blood of Israelites that was thus shed like water by Israelites, while the heathen, their neighbours, to whom the name of Israel had formerly been a terror, cried, *Aha, so we would have it*.

(4.) The consequence of this was, that the children of Israel, though they were not brought back to the house of David, which by so great a blow, sure they would have been, had not the determinate counsel of God been otherwise; yet for that time they were brought under, ver. 18. Many cities were taken, and remained in the possession of the kings of Judah; as Bethel particularly, ver. 19. What went with the golden calf there when it came into the hands of the kings of Judah, we are not told, perhaps it was removed to some place of greater safety, and at length to Samaria, Hoz. viii. 5. yet in Jehu's time we find it at Bethel, 2 Kings x. 29. Perhaps Abijah, when it was in his power to demolish it, suffered it to stand, for his heart was not perfect with God; and not improving what he had got for the honour of God, he soon lost it all again.

Lastly, The death both of the conquered and of the conqueror, not long after.

1. Jeroboam never looked up after this defeat, though he lived two or three years after. He could not recover strength again, ver. 20. But the Lord struck him either with some bodily disease, of which he languished; or with melancholy and trouble of mind, his heart was broke, and vexation at his loss brought his head, probably by this time a hoary head, with sorrow to the grave. He escaped the sword of Abijah, but God struck him: there is no escaping his sword.

2. Abijah waxed mighty upon it: What number of wives and children he had before, doth not appear; but now he multiplied his wives to fourteen in all, by whom he had thirty-eight children, ver. 21. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of those arrows. It seems he had ways by himself, and sayings of his own, which were recorded with his acts in the history of those times, ver. 22. But the number of his months were cut off in the midst, and soon after his triumphs, death conquered the conqueror. Perhaps he was too much lifted up with his victories, and therefore God would not let him live long to enjoy the honour of them.

C H A P. XIV.

In this and the two following chapters we have the history of the reign of Aſa; a good reign, and a long one. In this chapter we have, (1.) His piety, ver. 1—5. (2.) His policy, ver. 6—8. (3.) His prosperity, and particularly a glorious victory he obtained over a great army of Ethiopians that came out againſt him, ver. 9—15.

1. **S**O Abijah ſlept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Aſa his ſon reigned in his ſtead: in his days the land was quiet ten years. 2. And Aſa did *that which was good and right* in the eyes of the LORD his God. 3. For he took away the altars of the ſtrange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves: 4. And commanded Judah to ſeek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law, and the commandment. 5. Alſo he took away out of all the cities of Judah, the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him. 6. ¶ And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had reſt, and he had no war in thoſe years; becauſe the LORD had given him reſt. 7. Therefore he ſaid unto Judah, Let us build theſe cities, and make about *them* walls, and towers, gates, and bars, *while the land is yet before us*; becauſe we have fought the LORD our God, we have fought *him*, and he hath given us reſt on every ſide; ſo they built and prospered. 8. And Aſa had an army of men that bare targets and ſpears, out of Judah three hundred thouſand; and out of Benjamin, that bare ſhields and drew bows, two hundred and fourſcore thouſand: all theſe *were* mighty men of valour.

Here is, 1. Aſa's general character, ver. 2. He did *that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God*. (1.) He aimed at pleaſing God; ſtudied to approve himſelf to him; happy they that walk by this rule to do that, not which is right in their own eyes, or in the eyes of the world, but which is ſo in God's eyes. (2.) He ſaw God's eye always upon him, and that helped much to keep him to that which is good and right. (3.) God graciously accepted of him in what he did, and approved it as good and right.

2. A bleſſed work of reformation which he ſet on foot immediately upon his acceſſion to the crown.

(1.) He removed and aboliſhed idolatry. Since Solomon admitted it in the latter end of his reign, nothing had been done to ſuppreſs it, and ſo we preſume it had got ground, ſtrange gods were worſhipped, and had their altars, images, and groves; and the temple ſervice, though kept up by the prieſts, chap. xiii. 10, was neglected by many of the people. Aſa, as ſoon as he had power in his hands, made it his buſineſs to deſtroy all thoſe idolatrous altars and images, ver. 3—5. they being a great provocation of a jealous God, and a great temptation to a careleſs unthinking people. He hoped by deſtroying the idols to reform the idolaters, which he aimed at, and not the ruin of them.

(2.) He revived and eſtabliſhed the pure worſhip of God; and ſince the prieſts did their part in attending God's altars, he obliged the people to do theirs, ver. 4. he commanded Judah to ſeek the Lord God of their fathers, and not the gods of the heathen, and to do the law and the commandments, i. e. to obſerve all divine inſtitutions, which many had neglected and never minded. In doing this *the land was quiet before him*, ver. 5. Though they were much in love with their idols, and very loth to leave them, yet the convictions of their conſciences ſided with the commands of Aſa, and they could not for ſhame but comply with them. Note, They that have power in their hands, and will uſe it vigorously for the ſuppreſſion of profaneneſs and the reformation of manners, will not meet with ſo much difficulty and oppoſition therein as perhaps they feared. Vice is a ſneaking thing, and virtue has reaſon enough on its ſide to make *all iniquity ſtop her mouth*, Pſal. cvii. 42.

3. The tranquillity of his kingdom, after too conſtant alarms of war during the laſt two reigns. *In his days the land was quiet ten years*, ver. 1. no war with the kingdom of Iſrael, who did not recover the blow given them in the laſt reign of a great while. Abijah's victory, which was owing under God to his courage and bravery, laid a foundation for Aſa's peace, which was the reward of his piety and reformation. Though Abijah had little religion himſelf, he was inſtrumental to prepare the way for one that had a great deal. If Abijah had not done what he did to quiet the land, Aſa could not have done what he did to reform it; for *inter arma ſilent leges*.

4. The prudent improvement he made of the tranquillity: *The land had reſt, for the Lord had given him reſt*. Note, If God give quietneſs, who then can give trouble? Job xxxiv. 29. Thoſe have reſt indeed, to whom God gives reſt; peace indeed, to whom Chriſt gives peace, *not as the world giveth*, John xiv. 27. Now (1.) Aſa takes notice of this reſt they had, both as the gift of God, *He hath given us reſt on every ſide*. Note, God muſt be acknowledged with thankſnells in the reſt we are bleſſed with, of body and mind, family and country; and as the reward of the reformation begun. *Becauſe we have fought the Lord our God, he has given us reſt*. Note, As the frowns and rebukes of providence ſhould be obſerved for a check to us in an evil way, ſo the ſmiles of providence ſhould be taken notice of for our encouragement in that which is good. See Hag. i. 18, 19. Mal. iii. 10. We find by experience that it is good to ſeek the Lord; it gives us reſt; while we purſue the world, we meet with nothing but vexation. (2.) He conſults with his people by their representatives, how to make a good uſe of the preſent gleams of peace they enjoyed; and concluded with them, (1.) That they muſt not be idle but buſy. Times of reſt from war ſhould be employed in work, for we muſt always find ourſelves ſomething to do. In the years when he had no war, he ſaid, let us build, ſtill let us be doing. When the churches had reſt, they were built up, Acts ix. 31. When the ſword is ſheathed, take up the trowel. (2.) That they muſt not be ſecure, but prepare for wars. In times of peace we muſt be getting ready for trouble, expect it, and lay up in ſtore for it. 1. He fortified his principal cities with walls, towers, gates, and bars, ver. 7. This let us do, ſaith he, *while the land is yet before us*, i. e. while we have opportunity and advantage for it, and have nothing to hinder us. He ſpeaks as if he expected that ſome way or other trouble would ariſe, when it would be too late to fortify, and when they would wiſh they had done it: *So they built and prospered*. 2. He had a

good army ready to bring into the field, ver. 8. not a ſtanding army, but the militia or trained bands of the country. Judah and Benjamin were muſtered ſeverally, and Benjamin, (that not long ago was called little Benjamin, Pſal. lxxviii. 27.) had almoſt as many ſoldiers as Judah, came as near as twenty-eight to thirty, ſo ſtrangely had that tribe increaſed of late. The bleſſing of God can make a little one to become a thouſand. It ſhould ſeem theſe two tribes were differently armed, both offeniſively and deſenſively. The men of Judah guarded themſelves with targets, the men of Benjamin with ſhields, the former much bigger than the latter, 1 Kings x. 16, 17. The men of Judah fought with ſpears when they cloſed in with the enemy; the men of Benjamin drew bows to reach the enemy at a diſtance, both did good ſervice, and neither could ſay to the other, *I have no need of thee*. Different gifts and employments are for the common good.

9. ¶ And there came out againſt them Zerah the Ethiopian, with an hoſt of a thouſand thouſand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareſhah. 10. Then Aſa went out againſt him, and they ſet the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareſhah. 11. And Aſa cried unto the LORD his God, and ſaid, LORD, *it is nothing with thee to help*, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we reſt on thee, and in thy name we go againſt this multitude: O LORD, thou art our God, let not man prevail againſt thee. 12. So the LORD ſmote the Ethiopians before Aſa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. 13. And Aſa and the people that *were* with him purſued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themſelves, for they were deſtroyed before the LORD, and before his hoſt; and they carried away very much ſpoil. 14. And they ſmote all the cities round about Gerar; for the fear of the LORD came upon them: and they ſpoiled all the cities, for there was exceeding much ſpoil in them. 15. They ſmote alſo the tents of cattle, and carried away ſheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jeruſalem.

Here is, 1. Diſturbance given to the peace of Aſa's kingdom by a formidable army of Ethiopians that invaded them, ver. 9, 10. Though ſtill they fought God, yet this fear came upon them, that their faith in God might be tried, and that God might have an opportunity of doing great things for them. It was a vaſt number that the Ethiopians brought againſt him, *a thouſand thouſand men*, and now he found the benefit of having an army ready raiſed againſt ſuch a time of need. That proviſion we thought needleſs may ſoon appear to be of great advantage.

2. The application Aſa made to God on occaſion of this threatening cloud that hung over his head, ver. 11. He that fought God in the day of his peace and proſperity could with holy boldneſs cry to God in the day of his trouble, and call him his God. His prayer is ſhort but has much in it.

(1.) He gives to God the glory of his infinite power and ſovereignty. *It is nothing with thee to help and ſave*, by many or few, by them that are mighty, or by them that have no power. See 1 Sam. xiv. 6. God works in his own ſtrength, not in the ſtrength of inſtruments, Pſal. xxi. 13. nay, it is his glory to help the *weakeſt*, and perfect ſtrength out of the mouths of babes and ſucklings. We do not ſay, Lord, take our part, for we have a good army for thee to work by, but take our parts, for without thee we have no power. (2.) He takes hold of their covenant-relation to God as theirs. *O Lord our God*, and again, *thou art our God* whom we have choſen and cleave to as ours, and who has promiſed to be ours. (3.) He pleads their dependence upon God, and the eye they had to him in this expedition. He was well prepared for it, yet truſted not to his preparation, but, Lord, *we reſt on thee, and in thy name we go againſt this multitude*, by warrant from thee, aiming at thy glory, and truſting to thy ſtrength. (4.) He intereſts God in their cauſe, *let not man* (mortal man, ſo the word is) *prevail againſt thee*. If he prevail againſt us, it will be ſaid that he prevails againſt thee, becauſe thou art our God and we reſt on thee, and go forth in thy name, which thou haſt encouraged us to do. The enemy is a mortal man; make it to appear what an unequal match he is for an immortal God. Lord, maintain thine own honour; *hallowed be thy name*.

3. The glorious victory God gave him over his enemies; (1.) God deſerted the enemy, and put their forces into diſorder, ver. 12. *The Lord ſmote the Ethiopians*, ſmote them with terror, and an unaccountable conſternation, ſo that they fled, and knew neither why nor whither. (2.) Aſa and his ſoldiers took the advantage God gave them againſt the enemy. (1.) They deſtroyed them. *They ſell before the Lord*, (for who can ſtand before him?) and before his hoſt, either an inviſible hoſt of angels that were employed to deſtroy them, or the hoſt of Iſrael, called God's hoſt, becauſe owned by him. (2.) They took the plunder of their camp; *carried away very much ſpoil* from the ſlain, and from the bag and baggage. (3.) They ſmote the cities that were in league with them to which they fled for ſhelter, and carried off the ſpoil of them, ver. 14. and they were not able to make any reſiſtance, *for the fear of the Lord came upon them*, i. e. a fear which God ſtruck them with to that degree that they had no heart to withſtand the conquerors. (4.) They fetched away the cattle out of the enemy's country in vaſt numbers, ver. 15. Thus the wealth of the ſinner is laid up for the juſt.

C H A P. XV.

Aſa and his army were now returning in triumph from the battle laden with ſpoils, and adorned with the trophies of victory; the pious prince we may now ſuppoſe ſtudying what he ſhould render to God for this great favour; he knows the work of reformation which he had begun in his kingdom is not perfected; his enemies abroad were ſubdued, but there were more dangerous enemies at home that were yet unconquered; idols in Judah and Benjamin; his victory over the former emboldens him vigorously to renew his attack upon the latter. Now here we have, (1.) The meſſenger which God ſent him by a prophet to engage him to, and encourage him in, the proſecution of his reformation, ver. 1—7. (2.) The liſe which this meſſage put into that good cauſe, and their doings in purſuance of it. Idols removed, ver. 8. The ſpoil dedicated to God, ver. 9, 10, 11. A covenant

made with God, and a law for the punishing of idolaters, ver. 12—15. A reformation at court, ver. 16. Dedicated things brought into the house of God, ver. 18. All well, but that the high places were permitted, ver. 17. And the effect of this was great peace, ver. 19.

1. **A**ND the spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. 2. And he went out to meet Afa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Afa, and all Judah and Benjamin, The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye forsake him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. 3. Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law, 4. But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. 5. And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. 6. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity. 7. Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.

It was a great happiness to Israel that they had prophets among them; yet while they were thus blessed they were strangely addicted to idolatry, whereas when the spirit of prophecy was ceased under the second temple, and the canon of the Old Testament was completed, which was constantly read in their synagogues, they were pure from idolatry, for the scriptures are of all other the most sure word of prophecy, and most effectual, and the church could not be so easily imposed upon by a counterfeit Bible, as by a counterfeit prophet.

Here was a prophet sent to Afa and his army, when they returned victorious from the war with the Ethiopians, not to compliment them and congratulate their success, but to quicken them to their duty, that is the proper business of God's ministers, even with princes and the greatest of men. The Spirit of God came upon the prophet, ver. 1. both to instruct him what he should say, and to enable him to say it with clearness and boldness.

1. He told them plainly upon what terms they stood with God: let them not think that now they had got this victory all was their own for ever: no, he lets them know they were upon their good behaviour. Let them do well, and it would be well with them, otherwise not. (1.) The Lord is with you, while you be with him. This is both a word of comfort, that those who keep close to God shall always have his presence with them; and also a word of caution, he is with you while you be with him, but no longer; you have now a signal token of his favourable presence with you, but the continuance of it depends upon your perseverance in the way of your duty. (2.) If you seek him he will be found of you: Sincerely desire his favour, and aim at it, and you shall obtain it. Pray and you shall prevail: He never said, nor never will, seek ye me in vain. See Heb. xi. 6. But, (3.) If you forsake him and his ordinances, he is not tied to you, but will certainly forsake you, and then you are undone, your present triumphs will be no security to you; woe to you, when God departs.

2. He set before them the dangerous consequence of forsaking God and his ordinances, and that there was no way of having grievances redressed, but by repenting and returning unto God. When Israel forsook their duty, they were over-run with a deluge of atheism, impiety, irreligion, and all irregularity, ver. 3. and were continually embarrassed with vexations and destroying wars, foreign and domestic, ver. 5, 6. But when their troubles drove them to God, they found it not in vain to seek him, ver. 4. But the question is, what time this refers to?

(1.) Some think it looks as far back as the days of the judges. A long season ago Israel was without the true God; for they worshipped false gods, it was a time of ignorance, for though they had priests, they had no teaching priests; though they had elders, yet no law to any purpose, ver. 3. These were sad times, when they were frequently oppressed by one enemy or other, and grievously harassed by Moabites, Midianites, Ammonites, and other nations, they were vexed with all adversity, ver. 6. yet when in their perplexity they turned to God by repentance, prayer and reformation, he raised up deliverers for them. Then was that maxim often verified, that God is with us, while we are with him. Whatsoever things of this kind were written aforetime, were written for our admonition.

(2.) Others think it describes the present state of the ten tribes, who were now properly called Israel. Now sincere Jeroboam let up the calves, though he pretended to honour the God that brought them out of Egypt, yet his idolatry had brought them to downright infidelity, they are without the true God, and no marvel, when they were without teaching priests; Jeroboam's priests were not teachers, and thus they came to be without law: it is next to impossible, that any thing of religion should be kept up without a preaching ministry. In those times there was no peace, ver. 5. Their war with Judah gave them frequent alarms; so did the late insurrection of Baasha, and other occasions not mentioned. They provoked God with all iniquity, and then he vexed them with all adversity, yet, when they turned to God, he was intreated for them. Let Judah take notice of this, let their neighbours learn by their warnings. Give no countenance to graven images, for you see what mischiefs they are the rise of.

(3.) Others think the whole passage may be read in the future tense, and that it looks forward; hereafter Israel will be without the true God, and a teaching priest, and they will be destroyed by one judgment after another till they return to God, and seek him. See Hos. iii. 4.

3. Upon this he grounded his exhortation to them to prosecute the work of reformation with vigour, ver. 7. be strong for your work shall be rewarded. Note. (1.) God's work should be done with diligence and cheerfulness, but will not be done without resolution. (2.) This should quicken us to the work of religion, that we shall be sure not to lose by it at long run. It will not go unrewarded. How should it, when the work is its own reward?

8. And when Afa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD,

9. And he gathered all Judah, and Benjamin, and the stranger, with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: (for they felt to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him). 10. So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Afa. 11. And they offered unto the LORD the same time, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen, and seven thousand sheep. 12. And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their soul; 13. That whosoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. 14. And they swore unto the LORD with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. 15. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about. 16. ¶ And also concerning Maachah the mother of Afa the king, he removed her from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove: and Afa cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron. 17. But the high places were not taken away out of Israel: nevertheless, the heart of Afa was perfect all his days. 18. ¶ And he brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels. 19. And there was no more war unto the five and thirtieth year of the reign of Afa.

We are here told, what good effect the foregoing sermon had upon Afa.

1. He grew more bold for God than he had been, his victory would inspire him with some new degrees of resolution, but this message from God with much more; now he took courage, he saw how necessary a farther reformation was, and what assurance he had of God's presence with him in it; and this made him daring, and helped him over the difficulties which had before deterred him, and driven him off from the undertaking. Now he ventured to destroy all the abominable idols (and all idolatries are abominable, 1 Pet. iv. 3.) as far as ever his power went: Down with them all. He also renewed the altar of the Lord, which, it seems, was gone out of repair, though it was not past thirty-five years since Solomon's head was laid, who erected it. So soon did these ceremonial institutions begin to wax old, as things that in the fulness of time must vanish away, Heb. viii. 13.

2. He extended his influence farther than before, ver. 9. He summoned a solemn assembly, and particularly brought the strangers to it, who were come over to him from the ten tribes. (1.) Their coming was a great encouragement to him, for the reason why they came, was because they saw that the Lord his God was with him: It is good being with those that have God with them, to come into relation to, and contract acquaintance and friendship with those that live in the fear and favour of God; we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you, Zech. viii. 23. (2.) The cognisance he took of them, and the invitation he gave them to the general assembly, was a great encouragement to them. All strangers are to be helped, but those that cast themselves upon God's good providence purely to keep a good conscience, are worthy of double honour. Afa gave orders for the gathering of them together, ver. 9. yet it is said, ver. 10. they gathered themselves together, made it their own act, so forward were they to obey the king's orders. This meeting was held in the third month, probably at the feast of Pentecost, which was in that month.

3. He and his people offered sacrifices to God, as his share of the spoil they had got, ver. 11. Their offering here was nothing to Solomon's, chap. vii. 5. which was owing to the diminution either of their zeal or of their wealth, or of both. These sacrifices were intended by way of thanksgiving for the favours they had received, and supplication for farther favours. Prayers and praises are now our spiritual sacrifices. And as he took care that the altar should have its gift, so he took care that the temple should have its gold; he brought into the house of God all the dedicated things, ver. 18. It is honesty to render to God the things that are his. What has been long designed for him, and long laid by for him, as it should seem these dedicated things had been, let it at length be laid out for him; will a man rob God, or make slow payment to him, who is always ready to do us good?

4. They entered into covenant with God, repenting that they had violated their engagements to him, and resolving to do better for the future. It is proper for penitents, for converts, to renew their covenants. It should seem, the motion came not from Afa, but from the people themselves; let every man be a volunteer that covenants with God. Thy people shall be willing, Plal. ex. 3. Observe,

1. What was the matter of this covenant. Nothing but what they were before obliged to; and though no vow or promise of theirs could lay any higher obligation upon them, than they were already under from the divine precept, yet it would help to increase their sense of the obligation, to arm them against temptations, and would be a testimony to the equity and goodness of the precept. And by joining all together in this covenant, they strengthened the hands one of another. Two things they engaged themselves to. (1.) That they would diligently seek God themselves, seek his precepts, seek his favour; what is religion but seeking God, enquiring after him, applying to him upon all occasions? We shall not enjoy him till we come to heaven, while we are here we must continue seeking. That they would seek him as the God of their fathers, in the way that their fathers sought him, and in dependence upon the promise made to their fathers; and that they would do it with all their heart, and with all their soul; for those only seek God acceptedly and successfully, that are inward with him, intent upon him, and entire for him in their seeking of him. We make nothing of our religion, if we do not make heart work of it; God will have all the heart, or none; and when a jewel of such inestimable value as the divine favour is to be found, it is worth while to seek it with all their soul. (2.) That they would, to the utmost of their power, oblige others to seek him, ver. 13. They agreed, that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel, i. e. would either worship other gods, or refuse to join with them

then in the worship of the true God, that was either an obstinate idolater, or an obstinate atheist, he should be put to death. This was no new law of their own making, but an order to put in execution that law of God to this purpose, *Deut. xvii. 2, &c.* which if it had been duly executed there had not been so many abominable idols found in Judah and Benjamin as were, *ver. 8.* Whether men may now under the gospel be compelled by such methods as these to seek the Lord, is justly questioned, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, and yet mighty.

2. In what manner they made this covenant. (1.) With great cheerfulness, and all possible expressions of joy, *They swore unto the Lord*; not sneakingly as if they were either ashamed of what they did, or afraid of binding themselves too fast to him; but with a loud voice to express their own zeal, and to animate one another; and they all rejoiced at the oath, *ver. 14, 15.* Did not swear to God with reluctance, as the poor debtor confesseth a judgment to his creditor; but with all the pleasure and satisfaction imaginable, as the bridegroom plights his troth to the bride in the marriage covenant. Every honest Israelite was pleased with his own engagement to God, and they were all pleased with one another's. They rejoiced in it as an hopeful expedient to prevent their apostacy from God, and a happy indication of God's presence with God. Note, The times of renewing our covenant with God, should be times of rejoicing. And national reformation cannot but give general satisfaction to all that are good. It is an honour and happiness to be in bonds to God. (2.) They did it with great sincerity, zeal, and resolution: *they swore to God with all their hearts, and sought him with their whole desire.* It was an extraordinary good frame that Israel was now in; O that there had always been but such a good heart in them! This comes in as the reason why they rejoiced so much in what they did, it was because they were hearty in it. Note, Those only experience the pleasure and comfort of religion that are sincere and upright in it. What is done in hypocrisy is a mere drudgery. But if God have the heart, we have joy.

Lastly, We are told what was the effect of this their solemn covenanting with God.

1. God did very well for them. He was found of them and gave them rest round about, *ver. 15.* so that there was no war for a long time after, *ver. 19.* no open general war, though there were constant bickerings between Judah and Israel upon the frontiers, *1 Kings xv. 16.* National piety procures national blessings.

2. They did pretty well for him. They carried on the reformation so far that Maachah the queen-mother was deposed for idolatry, and her idol destroyed, *ver. 16.* This was bravely done of Afa, that he would not connive at idolatry in those that were nearest to him, like Levi, that said to his father and mother, *I have not seen him*, *Deut. xxxiii. 9.* Afa knows he must honour God more than his grandmother, and dare not leave an idol in an apartment of his palace, while he is destroying idols in the cities of his kingdom. We may suppose this Maachah was so far convinced of her sin, that she was willing to subscribe the association mentioned, *ver. 12, 13.* binding herself to seek the Lord, and therefore was not put to death, as those were that refused to sign it; great as well as small, women as well as men (which perhaps they put in with an eye to her; but because she had been an idolater, Afa thought fit to divest her of the dignity and authority she had, and probably he banished her the court, and confined her to privacy, lest she should influence and infect others. But the reformation was not complete, the high places were not all taken away, though many of them were, *chap. xiv. 3, 5.* Those in the cities were removed, but not those in the country villages; or those in the cities of Judah, not those in the cities of Israel which were reduced to the house of David; or those that were used in the service of false gods, not those that were used in the service of the God of Israel, those he connived at, and yet his heart was perfect. There may be defects in some particular duties, where yet the heart for the main is upright with God; sincerity is something less than sinless perfection.

C H A P. XVI.

This chapter concludes the history of the reign of Afa, but doth not represent his latter end so good as his beginning, (1.) Here is a foolish treaty with Ben-hadad king of Syria, *ver. 1—6.* (2.) The reproof which God sent him for it by a prophet, *ver. 7—9.* (3.) Afa's displeasure against the prophet for his faithfulness, *ver. 10.* (4.) The sickness, death, and burial of Afa, *ver. 11—14.*

1. IN the six and thirtieth year of the reign of Afa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, to the intent that he might let none go out, or come in to Afa king of Judah. 2. Then Afa brought out silver and gold, out of the treasures of the house of the LORD, and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-hadad king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, 3. There is a league between me and thee, as there was between my father, and thy father: behold, I have sent thee silver and gold; go, break thy league with Baasha, king of Israel, that he may depart from me. 4. And Ben-hadad hearkened unto king Afa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abel-maim, and all the store-cities of Naphtali. 5. And it came to pass when Baasha heard it, that he left off building of Ramah, and let his work cease. 6. Then Afa the king took all Judah, and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

How to reconcile the date of this event with the history of the kings, I am quite at a loss, Baasha died in the twenty-sixth year of Afa, *1 Kings xvi. 8.* How then could this be done in his thirty-sixth year, when Baasha's family was quite cut off, and Omri was upon the throne? it is generally said to be meant of the thirty-sixth year of the kingdom of Afa, viz. that of Judah beginning from the first of Rehoboam, and so it falls to be the sixteenth of Afa's reign. But then *chap. xv. 19.* must be so understood, and how could it be spoken of as a great thing that there was no more war till the fifteenth year of Afa, when that passage immediately before was in the fifteenth year, *chap. xv. 10.* and after this miscarriage of his here he had wars, *ver. 9.* Josephus places it in his twenty-sixth year, and then we must suppose a mistake in the transcriber here, and *chap. xv. 19.* which if we admit, the computation is easy.

This passage we had before, *1 Kings xv. 17, &c.* and Afa was several ways faulty in it. (1.) He did not do well to make a league with Ben-hadad a heathen king, and to value himself so much upon it as he seems to do, *ver. 3.* Had he relied more upon his covenant, and his father's with God, he would not have boasted so much of his league and his father's with the royal family of Syria. (2.) If he had had a due regard to the honour of Israel in general, he would have found some other expedient to give Baasha a diversion, than by calling in a foreign force, and inviting into the country a common enemy, that in process of time might be a plague to Judah too. (3.) It was doubtless a sin in Ben-hadad to break his league with Baasha, upon no provocation, but only to get a bribe for doing it; and if so, certainly it was a sin in Afa to move him to it, especially to hire him to do it. The public faith of kings and kingdoms must not be made so cheap a thing. (4.) To take silver and gold out of the house of the Lord for this purpose, was a great aggravation of the sin, *ver. 2.* Must the temple be plundered to serve his carnal policies? He had better have brought gifts and offerings, with prayers and supplications, to the house of the Lord, that he might have engaged God on his side, and made him his friend; then he had not needed to have been at this expence to make Ben-hadad his friend. (5.) I wish Afa were not to answer for all the mischief that the army of Ben-hadad did unjustly to the cities of Israel, all the blood they shed, and all the spoils they made, *ver. 4.* Perhaps Afa intended not they should carry the matter so far. But they that draw others to sin, know not what they do nor where it will end; the beginning of sin, is as the letting forth of water.

However, the project succeeded. Ben-hadad gave Baasha a powerful diversion, obliging him to leave off building Ramah, and betake himself to the defence of his own country northwards; which gave Afa an opportunity not only to demolish his fortifications, but to seize the materials, and convert them to his own use.

7. ¶ And at that time Hanani the seer came to Afa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. 8. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet because thou didst rely on the LORD he delivered them into thine hand. 9. For the eyes of the LORD, run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him. Herein thou hast done foolishly; therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. 10. Then Afa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison-house; for he was in a rage with him, because of this thing. And Afa oppressed some of the people the same time. 11. ¶ And, behold, the acts of Afa, first and last, lo, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel, 12. And Afa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign, was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians. 13. ¶ And Afa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign, 14. And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours, and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him.

Here is, 1. A plain and faithful reproof given to Afa by a prophet of the Lord for making this league with Baasha. The reprover was Hanani the seer, the father of Jehu another prophet, whom we read of *1 Kings xvi. 1. 2 Chron. xix. 2.* We observed several things amiss in Afa's treaty with Ben-hadad. But that which the prophet chargeth upon him as the greatest fault he was guilty of in that matter, is his relying on the king of Syria, and not on the Lord his God, *ver. 7.* He thought, though God was on his side, that would not stand him in stead unless he had Ben-hadad on his side; that God either could not or would not help him, but he must take this indirect course to help himself. Note, God is much displeased when he is distrusted, and when an arm of flesh is relied on more than his power and goodness. By putting our confidence in God we give honour to him, and therefore he thinks himself affronted if we give that honour to another. He plainly tells the king, herein he had done foolishly, *ver. 9.* It is a foolish thing to lean on a broken reed, when we had the Rock of ages to rely upon. To convince him of his folly he shews him.

(1.) That he acted against his experience, *ver. 8.* He of all men had no reason to distrust God, who had found him such a powerful helper by whom he had been made to triumph over a very threatening enemy, as his father before him, because he relied upon the Lord his God, *chap. xiii. 18—xiv. 11.* What? saith the prophet, were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host? enow to swallow up a kingdom? and yet because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand, and was not he sufficient to help thee against Baasha? Note, The many experiences we have had of the goodness of God to us aggravate our distrust of him. Has he not helped us in six troubles? and have we any reason to suspect him in the seventh? but see how deceitful our hearts are! we trust in God when we have nothing else to trust to; when need drives us to him, but when we have others things to stay on, we are apt to stay too much on them, and to lean to our own understanding as long as that has any thing to offer, but a believing confidence will be in God only, when a smiling word courts it most.

(2.) That he acted against his knowledge of God and his providence, *ver. 9.* Afa could not be ignorant that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the earth, strongly to hold with them (so it may be read) whose heart is perfect towards him; that is, 1. That God governs the world in infinite wisdom, and the creatures and all their actions are continually under his eye. The eye of providence is quick-sighted, it runs, it is intent, it runs to and fro, it reacheth far, through the whole earth, no corner of it is from under it, not the most dark or distant; and his eye directs his hand and the arm of his power; for he shews himself strong. Doth Satan walk to and fro in the earth? Providence runs to and fro, is never out of the way; never to seek, never at a loss. 2. That God governs the world for the good of his people; doth all in pursuance of the counsels of his love concerning their salvation, all for Jacob his servant's sake, and Israel his elect, *Isa. xlv. 4. Christ is heard*

over all things to the church, Eph. i. 22. 3. That they whose hearts are upright with him, may be sure of his protection, and have all the reason in the world to depend upon it. He is able to protect them in the way of their duty; for wisdom and might are his, and he actually intends their protection; and a practical disbelief of this, is at the bottom of all our departures from God and double-dealing with him. Afa could not trust God, and therefore made court to Ben-hadad.

(3.) That he acted against his interest. (1.) He had lost an opportunity of checking the growing greatness of the king of Syria, ver. 7. *His host is escaped out of thy hand*, which otherwise would have joined with Baasha's and fallen with it. (2.) He had incurred God's displeasure, and from henceforth must expect no peace, but the constant alarms of war, ver. 9. They that cannot find in their hearts to trust God, forfeit his protection, and throw themselves out of it.

(2.) Afa's displeasure at this reproof. Though it came from God by one that was known to be his messenger, though the reproof was just, and the reasoning fair, and all intended for his good, yet *he was wroth with the seer*, for telling him of his folly; nay, *he was in a rage with him*, ver. 10. Is this Afa? Is this he whose heart was perfect with the Lord his God all his day? Well, let him that thinketh he stands, take heed lest he fall. A wise man! and yet in a rage; an Israelite and yet in a rage with a prophet! A good man! and yet impatient of reproof, and that cannot bear to be told of his faults! Lord! what is man, when God leaves him to himself? They that idolize their own conduct cannot bear contradiction; and they that indulge a peevish passionate temper may be transported by it into impieties as well as into indecencies, and will some time or other fly in the face of God himself. See what gall and wormwood this root of bitterness bore.

(1.) In his rage he committed the prophet to the jail; *put him in a prison-house*, as a malefactor; in the stocks, so some read it, or into little-cage. God's prophets meet with many that cannot bear reproof, but take it haughtily, yet they must do their duty. (2.) When his hand was in, *he oppressed some of the people*, probably such as owned the prophet in his sufferings, or that were known to be his particular friends. He that abused his power for the persecuting of God's prophet, was left to himself farther to abuse it for the crushing of his own subjects, whereby he weakened himself and lost his interest. Most persecutors have been tyrants.

3. His sickness. Two years before he died, *he was diseased in his feet*, ver. 12. afflicted with the gout in a high degree. He put the prophet in the stocks, and now God put him in the stocks, so his punishment answered his sin. *His disease was exceeding great*; it came to the height, so some; it flew up to his head, so others; and then it was mortal. This was his affliction; but his sin was, that in his disease, instead of seeking the Lord for relief, he *sought to the physicians*. His making use of physicians was his duty; but trusting to them, and expecting that from them, which was to be had from God only; was his sin and folly. The help of creatures must always be used with an eye to the Creator, and independence upon him, who makes every creature that to us which it is, and without whom the most skillful and faithful are physicians of no value. Some think, these physicians were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and were a sort of conjurers, to whom he applied himself as if there was not a God in Israel.

4. His death and burial. His funeral had something of extraordinary solemnity in it, ver. 14. they made a very magnificent *burying for him*. I am loth to think (as some do) that he himself ordered this funeral pomp, and that it was an instance of his vanity, that he would be buried like the Gentiles, and not after the way of the Jews. It is said indeed he *digged the sepulchre for himself*, as one mindful of his grave; but I am willing to believe it was rather an expression of the great respect his people retained for him, notwithstanding the failings and infirmities of his latter days. It was agreed to do him honour at his death. Note, The eminent piety and usefulness of good men ought to be remembered to their praise, though they have had their blemishes. Let their faults be buried in their graves, while their services are remembered over their graves. He that said, *There is not a just man that doth good and sins not*, yet said also, *The memory of the just is blessed*; and let it be so.

C H A P. XVII.

Here begins the life and reign of Jehoshaphat, who was one of the first three among the royal worthies, one of the best that ever swayed the sceptre of Judah since David's head was laid. He was the good son of a good father, so that at this time grace ran in the blood, even the blood royal; happy the son that had such a father, to lay a good foundation in him and for him. Happy the father that had such a son, to build so well upon the foundation he had laid, and happy the kingdom that was blessed with two such kings, two such reigns together. In this chapter we have, (1.) His accession to, and establishment in the throne, ver. 1, 2, 5. His personal piety, ver. 3, 4, 6. (2.) The course he took to promote religion in the kingdom, ver. 7—9. (3.) The mighty fear he bore among the neighbours, ver. 10, 11. (4.) The great strength of his kingdom both in garrisons and land-forces, ver. 12—19. Thus was his prosperity the reward of his piety, and his piety really the brightest grace and ornament of his prosperity.

1. **A**ND Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2. And he placed forces in all the fenced cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Afa his father had taken. 3. And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and fought not unto Baalim; 4. But fought to the LORD God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel: 5. Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand, and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents, and he had riches and honour in abundance. 6. And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover, he took away the high places and groves out of Judah. 7. ¶ Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nathaneel, and to Michaiiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. 8. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and

Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama, and, Jehoram, priests. 9. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.

Here we find concerning Jehoshaphat,

1. What a wise man he was. As soon as he came to the crown, he *strengthened himself against Israel*, ver. 1. Ahab had now been three years upon the throne of Israel, an active warlike prince; the vigour of his beginning falling in with the decay of Afa's conclusion, it is probable the kingdom of Israel, had of late got ground of the kingdom of Judah, and began to grow formidable to it; so that the first thing Jehoshaphat had to do, was to make his part good on that side, and to check the growing greatness of the king of Israel, which he did so effectually, and without bloodshed, that Ahab soon courted his alliance, so far was he from giving him any disturbance, and proved more dangerous as a friend, than he could have been as an enemy. Jehoshaphat strengthened himself, not to act offensively against Israel, or invade them, but only to maintain his own; which he did by fortifying the cities that were on his frontiers, and putting garrisons, stronger than had been, in the cities of Ephraim, which he was master of, ver. 2. He did not strengthen himself as his father did, by a league with the king of Syria, but by fair and regular methods, on which he might expect the blessing of God, and in which he trusted God.

2. What a good man he was. It is an excellent character that is here given him, and very observable,

(1.) That he *walked in the ways of his father David*. In the characters of the kings, David's ways are often made the standard, as 1 Kings xv. 3—11. 2 Kings xiv. 3.—xvi. 2.—xviii. 3. But never with such a distinction as here between his first ways and his last ways, for the last were not so good as the first: his ways before he fell so foully in the matter of Uriah, (which is mentioned long after in the bar of his escutcheon, 1 Kings xv. 5.) were good ways, and though he happily recovered from that fall, yet perhaps he never while he lived fully retrieved the spiritual strength and comfort he lost by it. Jehoshaphat followed David as far as he followed God, and no farther. St. Paul himself thus limits our imitation of him, 1 Cor. xi. 1. *Follow me, as I follow Christ*, and not otherwise. Many good people have had their first ways, which were their best ways; their first love, which was their strongest love; and in every copy we propose to write after, as we must single out that only which is good, so that chiefly which is best. The words here will admit another reading, they run thus; *He walked in the ways of David his father, (Harschomim) those first ways*; or, *those ancient ways*: he proposed to himself for his example the primitive times of the royal family, those purest times, before the corruptions of the late reigns came in. See Jer. vi. 16. The LXX. leaves out David, and so refers it to Afa; *he walked in the first ways of his father*, and did not imitate him in what was amiss in him towards the latter end of his time. It is good to be cautious in following the best men, lest we step aside after them.

(2.) That he *sought not to Baalim, but sought to the Lord God of his father*, ver. 3, 4. The neighbour nations had their Baalim, one had one Baal, and another had another; but he abhorred them all, had nothing to do with them: he *worshipped the Lord God of his father*, and him only; prayed to him only, and inquired of him only: both are included in seeking him.

(3.) That he *walked in God's commandments*, not only worshipped the true God, but worshipped him according to his own institution, *and not after the doings of Israel*, ver. 4. Though the king of Israel was his neighbour and ally, yet he did not learn his way. Whatever dealings he had with him in civil matters, he would not have communion with him, nor comply with him in his religion: there he kept close to the rule.

4. That *his heart is lifted up in the ways of the Lord*, ver. 6. or, *he lifted up his heart*. He brought his heart to his work, and lifted up his heart in it; i. e. he had a sincere regard to God in it. *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul*. His heart was enlarged in that which is good, Psalm cxix. 32. He never thought he could do enough for God. He was lively and affectionate in his religion, *servant in spirit, serving the Lord*; cheerful and pleasant in it, and went on his work with alacrity; as Jacob, who after his vision of God at Beth-el, lit up his feet, Gen. xix. 1. marg. He was bold and resolute in the ways of God, and went on with courage; his heart was lifted up above the consideration of the difficulties that were in the way of his duty, he easily got over them all, and was not frightened with winds and clouds, from sowing and reaping, Eccl. 4. Let us walk in the same spirit.

3. What a useful man he was: not only a good man, but a good king: he not only was good himself, but did good in his generation, did a great deal of good.

(1.) He took away the *teachers of lies*, so images are called, Hab. ii. 18. the *high places and the groves*, ver. 6. It is meant of those in which idols were worshipped; for those that were dedicated to the true God only, were not taken away, chap. xx. 33. Idolatry he only abolished; nothing debauched the nation more than those idolatrous groves or images which he took away.

(2.) He sent forth teachers of truth. When he inquired into the state of religion in his kingdom, he found his people generally very ignorant, they *knew not that they did evil*; even in the last good reign, there had been little care taken to instruct them in their duty, and therefore Jehoshaphat resolves to begin his work at the right end, deals with them as reasonable creatures, will not lead them blind-fold; no, not in a reformation, but endeavours to have them well taught, knowing that that was the way to have them well cured; in this work he employed, (1.) His princes; those about him he sent forth, those in the country he sent to teach the cities of Judah, ver. 7. He ordered them in the administration of justice, not only to correct the people when they did ill, but to teach them how to do better, and to give a reason for what they did, that the people might be informed of the difference between good and evil. The princes or judges upon the bench have a great opportunity of teaching people their duty to God and man, and it is not out of their province, for the laws of God are to be looked upon as laws of the land. (2.) The Levites and priests went with the princes, and taught in Judah, having the book of the Law with them, ver. 8. They were teachers by office, Deut. xxxiii. 13. it was part of the work for which they had their maintenance, the priests and the Levites had little else to do. But it seems they had neglected it, pretended perhaps, that they could not get the people to hear them: well, saith Jehoshaphat, you shall go along with the princes, and they with their authority shall oblige the people to come and hear you, and then if they be not well instructed it is your fault. What a great deal of good may be done when Moses and Aaron thus go hand and hand in the doing of it, when the princes with their power and the priests and Levites with their scripture-learning, agree to teach the people the good knowledge of God and their duty! These itinerant judges, and itinerant preachers, together,

together, were instrumental to diffuse a blessed light through the cities of Judah. But it is said they had the *book of the law of the Lord with them*, (1.) For their own conduct, that from thence they might fetch all the instructions they gave to the people, and not *teach for doctrines the commandments of men*. (2.) For the conviction of the people, that they might see that they had a divine warrant for what they said, and delivered to them that only which they received from the Lord. Note, Ministers when they go to teach the people, should have their Bibles with them.

4. How happy he was in the favour of his God, who signally owned and blessed him. *The Lord was with him*, ver. 3. *The word of the Lord was his help*, to the Chaldee paraphrase. *The Lord established the kingdom in his hand*, ver. 5. Those stand firm that have the presence of God with them. *If the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, that will establish the work of our hands*, and establish us in our integrity.

4. How happy he was in the affections of his people, ver. 5. *All Judah brought him presents* in acknowledgment of his kindness in sending preachers among them. The more there is of true religion among a people, the more there will be of conscientious loyalty. A government that answers the end of government, will be supported. The effect of the favour both of God and his kingdom was, that he had *riches and honour in abundance*. It is undoubtedly true, though few will believe it, that religion and piety is the best friend to outward prosperity. And observe it follows immediately, *his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord*. Riches and honour in abundance prove to many a clog and an hindrance in the ways of the Lord, and an occasion of pride, security and sensuality; but it had a quite contrary effect upon Jehoshaphat: his abundance was oil to the wheels of his obedience, and the more he had of the wealth of this world, the more was his heart lifted up in the ways of the Lord.

10. ¶ And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. 11. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and tribute-silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he-goats. 12. ¶ And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly: and he built in Judah, castles and cities of store. 13. And he had much business in the cities of Judah: and the men of war, mighty men of valour, were in Jerusalem. 14. And these are the numbers of them according to the house of their fathers: Of Judah, the captains of thousands; Adnah the chief, and with him mighty men of valour, three hundred thousand. 15. And next to him was Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and fourscore thousand. 16. And next him was Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself unto the LORD; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour. 17. And of Benjamin; Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him armed men, with bow and shield, two hundred thousand. 18. And next him was Jehozabad, and with him an hundred and fourscore thousand, ready prepared for the war. 19. These waited on the king, besides those whom the king put in the fenced cities, throughout all Judah.

We have here a farther account of Jehoshaphat's great prosperity, and the flourishing state of his kingdom.

1. He had a very good interest in the neighbouring princes and nations. Though he was not perhaps so great a soldier as David, which might make him their terror; nor so great a scholar as Solomon, which might make him their oracle; yet the fear of the Lord fell upon them, i. e. God so influenced and governed their spirits, that they had all a reverence for him, ver. 10. And (1.) None of them made war against him. God's good providence so ordered it, that while the princes and priests were intruding and reforming the country, none of his neighbours gave him any molestation to take him off from that good work. Thus when Jacob and his sons were going to worship at Bethel, the terror of God was upon the neighbouring cities that they did not pursue after them, Gen. xxxv. 5. and see Exod. xxxiv. 24.

(2.) Many of them brought presents to him, ver. 12. to secure his friendship. Perhaps it was a tribute imposed upon them by Aha, who made himself master of the cities of the Philistines, and the tents of the Arabians, chap. xiv. 14, 15. It is probable, with the seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and the same number of he-goats, which the Arabians brought, there was a proportionable number of ewes and lambs, she-goats and kids.

2. He had very considerable stores laid up in the cities of Judah; pulled down his barns and built bigger, ver. 12. *Cisterns and cities of store*, for arms and victuals. He was a man of business, and aimed at the public good in all his undertakings, either to preserve the peace, or prepare for war.

3. He had the militia in a very good posture; it was never in a better since David modeled it. Five lord lieutenants (if I may so call them) are here named, with the numbers of those under their command, the serviceable men, that were fit for war in their respective districts; three in Judah, and two in Benjamin. It is said of one of these great commanders, Amasiah, that he willingly offered himself unto the Lord, ver. 16. not only to the king, to serve him in his post, but to the Lord, to glorify him in it. He was the most eminent among them for religion; accepted the place not for the honour, or power, or profit of it; but for conscience sake towards God, that he might serve his country. It was usual for great generals then to offer of their spoils to the Lord, 1 Chron. xxvi. 26. but this good man offered himself first to the Lord, and then to his dedicated things.

The number of the soldiers under these five generals, amounts to eleven hundred and sixty thousand men. A vast number for so small a compass of ground as Judah's and Benjamin's lot was, to furnish out and maintain. Abijah could bring into the field but four hundred thousand, chap. xiv. 8. yet Jehoshaphat has at command almost twelve hundred thousand. But it must be considered, (1.) That God had promised to make the seed of Abraham like the sand of the sea for number. (2.) There had now been a long peace. (3.) The city of Jerusalem we may suppose very much enlarged.

(4.) Many were come over to them from the kingdom of Israel, chap. xv. 9. which would increase the numbers of the people. (5.) Jehoshaphat was under a special blessing of God, which made his affairs to prosper greatly. The armies we may suppose were dispersed all the country over, and each No. LXIII.*

man resided, for the most part, on his own estate, only appeared often to be mustered and trained, and were ready at call whenever there was occasion; but the commanders waited on the king, ver. 19. as officers of his court, privy-counsellors, and ministers of state.

But, lastly, observe; it was not this formidable army that struck a terror upon the neighbour nations, that restrained them from attempting any thing against Israel, or obliged them to pay tribute, but the fear of God which fell upon them when Jehoshaphat reformed his country, and set up a preaching ministry in it, ver. 10. The ordinances of God are more the strength and safety of a kingdom, than its military force, it is men of God, more than it is men of war.

C II A P. XVIII.

The story of this chapter we had just as it is here related in the story of the reign of Ahab king of Israel, 1 Kings xxii. There it looks one of the greatest beauties of the reign of Ahab, that he was in league with so good a man as Jehoshaphat; here it looks one of the greatest blemishes of the reign of Jehoshaphat, that he joined in affinity with so ill a man as Ahab. Here is, (1.) The alliance he contracted with Ahab, ver. 1. (2.) His consent to join with him in his expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead out of the hands of the Syrians, ver. 2, 3. (3.) Their consulting with the prophets, false and true, before they went, ver. 4—27. (4.) The success of their expedition. Jehoshaphat hardly escaped, ver. 28—32. and Ahab received his death's wound, ver. 33, 34.

1. NOW Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. 2. And after certain years, he went down to Ahab to Samaria: and Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead. 3. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people, and we will be with thee in the war.

Here is, (1.) Jehoshaphat's growing greater. It was said before, chap. xxvii. 5. he had *riches and honour in abundance*: and here it is said again, his wealth and honour increase upon him by piety and good management.

But, 2. Not growing wiser, else he would not have joined with Ahab, that degenerate Israelite, who had sold himself to work wickedness. What good could he get by a man that was so ill? What good could he do to a man that was so obstinately ill? An idolater, a persecutor; with him he joined in affinity, i. e. married his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah, the worst match that ever was made by any of the house of David; I wonder what Jehoshaphat could promise himself by it: (1.) Perhaps pride made the match as it doth many a one, which speeds accordingly. His religion forbade him to marry his son to a daughter of any of the heathen princes that were about him, thou shalt not take their daughters to thy sons, and having riches and honour in abundance, he thought it a disparagement to marry him to a subject: A king's daughter it must be, and therefore Ahab's, little considering that Jezebel was her mother. (2.) Some think he did it in policy, hoping by this expedient to unite the kingdoms in his son, Ahab perhaps flattering him with hopes that he would make him his heir, when he intended no such thing.

This match drew Jehoshaphat, (1.) Into an intimate familiarity with Ahab; he made him a visit at Samaria. And Ahab, proud of the honour which Jehoshaphat did him, gave him a very splendid entertainment, according to the splendor of those times, he killed sheep and oxen for him, plain meat, in abundance, ver. 2. In this Jehoshaphat did not walk so closely as he should have done in the ways of his father David, for he hated the congregation of evil-doers, and would not sit with the wicked, Psal. xxvi. 5. nor desired to eat of their dainties, Psal. cxi. 4. (2.) Into a league with Ahab against the Syrians. Ahab persuaded him to join forces with him in an expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, a city in the tribe of Gad, on the other side Jordan. Did not Ahab know that that, and all the other cities of Israel, did of right belong to Jehoshaphat, as heir of the house of David? With what face then could he ask Jehoshaphat to assist him in recovering it for himself, whose title to the crown was usurped and precarious? Yet Jehoshaphat, an easy man, yields to go with him; *I am as thou art*, ver. 3. Some men's kindnesses are dangerous, as well as their society infectious. The feast Ahab made for Jehoshaphat, was designed only to wheedle him into this expedition. The kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

4. ¶ And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD, to-day. 5. Therefore the king of Israel gathered together of prophets four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the king's hand. 6. But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him? 7. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him, for he never prophesieth good unto me, but always evil: the same is Michaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. 8. And the king of Israel called for one of his officers, and said, Fetch quickly Michaiah the son of Imla. 9. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah, sat either of them on his throne, clothed in their robes, and they sat in a void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets prophesied before them. 10. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah, had made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the LORD, With these thou shalt push Syria, until they be consumed. 11. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up

to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king. 12. And the messenger that went to call Micaiah, spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent: let thy word, therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good. 13. And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak. 14. And when he was come to the king, the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle or shall I forbear? And he said, Go ye up and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand. 15. And the king said to him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me, in the name of the LORD? 16. Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace. 17. (And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil?) 18. Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD, I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand, and on his left. 19. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. 20. Then there came out a spirit and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? 21. And he said, I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. 22. Now therefore behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee. 23. Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and smote Micaiah upon the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me, to speak unto thee? 24. And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see on that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. 25. Then the king of Israel said, Take ye Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son: 26. And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction, and with water of affliction, until I return in peace. 27. And Micaiah said, if thou certainly return in peace, then hath not the LORD spoken by me. And he said, Harken all ye people.

This is almost word for word the same with what we had 1 Kings xxii. We will not repeat what was there said, nor have we much to add, but may take occasion to think,

1. Of the great duty of acknowledging God in all our ways, and enquiring at his word, whatever we undertake. Jehoshaphat was not willing to proceed till he had done this, ver. 4. By particular believing prayer, by an unbiassed consulting of the scriptures and our own consciences, and by an observant regard to the hints of providence, we may make such enquiries, and very much to our satisfaction.

2. Of the great danger of bad company even to good men; those that have most wisdom, grace and resolution, cannot be sure that they can converse familiarly with wicked people and get no hurt by them. Jehoshaphat here in complaisance to Ahab sits in his robes patiently hearing the false prophets speaking lies in the name of the Lord, ver. 9. can scarce find in his heart to give him a too mild and gentle reproof for being a prophet of the Lord, ver. 7. and dares not rebuke that false prophet who basely abused that faithful seer, nor oppose Ahab who committed him to prison. They who venture among the seats of the scornful cannot come off without a great deal of the guilt, at least of the omission of their duty, unless they have such measures of wisdom and courage as few can pretend to.

3. Of the unhappiness of those who are surrounded with flatterers, especially flattering prophets who cry peace to them, and prophesy nothing but smooth things. Thus was Ahab cheated into his ruin, and justly; for he hearkened to such, and preferred them that humoured him, before a good prophet that gave him fair warning of his danger. Those do best for themselves that give their friends leave, and particularly their ministers, to deal plainly and faithfully with them, and take it not only patiently but kindly. That counsel is not always best for us that is most pleasing to us.

4. Of the power of Satan, by the divine permission, in the children of disobedience. One lying spirit can make four hundred lying prophets, and make use of them to deceive Ahab, ver. 21. The devil becomes a murderer by being a liar, and destroys men by deceiving them.

5. Of the justice of God in giving those up to strong delusions to believe a lie, who will not receive the love of the truth, but rebel against it, ver. 21. Let the lying spirit prevail to entice those to their ruin that will not be persuaded to their duty and happiness.

6. Of the hard case of faithful ministers whose lot it hath often been to be hated and persecuted and ill treated for being true to their God, and just and kind to the souls of men. Micaiah for discharging a good conscience was buffeted, imprisoned, and condemned to the bread and water of affliction. But he could with assurance appeal to the issue, as all of those may do who are run down for their faithfulness, ver. 27. The last day will declare who is in the right, and who in the wrong, when Christ will appear to the unspeakable consolation of his persecuted people, and the everlasting confusion of their persecutors, who will be made to see in that day, ver. 24, what they will not now believe.

28. So the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, went up to Ramoth-gilead. 29. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and will go to the battle, but put thou on thy robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went to the battle. 30. Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots that were with him, saying, Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the king of Israel. 31. And it came to pass when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel: therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God moved them to depart from him. 32. For it came to pass, that when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel: they turned back again from pursuing him. 33. And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: therefore he said to his chariot-man, Turn thine hand, that thou mayst carry me out of the host, for I am wounded. 34. And the battle increased that day: howbeit, the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians, until the even: and about the time of the sun going down, he died.

We have here, 1. Good Jehoshaphat exposing himself in his robes, thereby endangered and yet delivered. We have reason to think that Ahab, while he pretended friendship, really aimed at Jehoshaphat's life, to take him off, that he might have the management of his successor, who was his son-in-law, else he would never have advised him to enter into the battle with his robes on, which was but to make himself an easy mark to the enemy: and it really he intended that, it was as villainous a piece of treachery as ever man was guilty of, and justly was he himself taken in the pit he digged for his friend. The enemy had soon an eye upon the robes, and vigorously attacked the unwary prince, who now when it was too late wished himself in the habit of the poorest soldier, rather than in his princely raiment. He cried out, either to his friends to relieve him, but Ahab took no care of that: or to his enemies to rectify their mistake, and let them know that he was not the king of Israel; or to God, for succour and deliverance; to whom else should he cry? And he found it was not in vain, the Lord helped him out of his distress, by moving the captains to depart from him, ver. 32. God has all mens hearts in his hand, and turns them as he pleaseth, contrary to their own first intentions, to serve his purposes. Many are moved unaccountably both to themselves and others, but an invisible power moves them. 2. Wicked Ahab disguising himself, arming himself, thereby he thought securing himself, and yet slain, ver. 33. No art, no arms, can save those whom God has appointed to ruin. What can hurt those whom God will protect? and what can shelter those whom God will destroy? Jehoshaphat is safe in his robes, Ahab killed in his armour, for the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong.

C H A P. XIX.

We have here a further account of the good reign of Jehoshaphat, (1.) His return in peace to Jerusalem, ver. 1. (2.) The reproof given him for his league with Ahab, and his acting in conjunction with him, ver. 2, 3. (3.) The great care he took thereupon to reform his kingdom, ver. 4. (4.) The instructions he gave to his judges, both those in the country towns that kept the inferior courts, ver. 5—7. and those in Jerusalem that sat in the supreme judicature of the kingdom, ver. 8—11.

1. AND Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. 2. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldst thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. 3. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God. 4. And Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem: and he went out again through the people, from Beer-sheba to mount Ephraim, and brought them back unto the LORD God of their fathers.

Here is, 1. The great favour God shewed to Jehoshaphat. 1. In bringing him back in safety from his dangerous expedition with Ahab, which had like to have cost him dear, ver. 1. He returned to his house in peace. Notice is taken of this to intimate, (1.) That he fared better than he had expected. He had been in imminent peril, and yet came home in peace. Whenever we return in peace to our houses we ought to acknowledge God's providence in preserving our going out and our coming in. But if we have been kept through more than ordinary dangers, we are in a special manner bound to be thankful. There was but a step perhaps between us and death, and yet we are alive. (2.) That he fared better than he deserved; he was out of the way of his duty, had been out upon an expedition which he could not well account for to God and his conscience, and yet he returned in peace, for God is not extreme to mark what we do amiss, nor doth he withdraw his protection every time we forfeit it. (3.) That he fared better than Ahab king of Israel did, who was brought home slain, though Jehoshaphat had said to Ahab, I am as thou art, God distinguished him, for he knows and owns the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Distinguishing mercies are very obliging; two kings in the field together, one taken and the other left, one brought home in blood, the other in peace.

2. In sending him a reproof for his affinity with Ahab. It is a great mercy to be made sensible of our faults, and to be told in time wherein we have

have erred, that we may repent and amend the error before it be too late. The prophet by whom the reproof is sent is Jehu the son of Hanani: the father was an eminent prophet in the last reign, by the same token that Ahab put him in the stocks for his plain dealing; yet the son was not afraid to reprove another king. St. Paul would have his son Timothy not only not discouraged but animated by his sufferings, *2 Tim. iii. 11, 14.*

(1.) He tells him plainly, that he had done very ill in joining with Ahab; *Shouldst thou, a godly man, help the ungodly, give them a hand of fellowship, and lend them a hand of assistance? Or, shouldst thou love them that hate the Lord, wilt thou lay those in thy bosom whom God beholds afar off?* It is the black character of wicked people that they are *haters of God*, Rom. i. 30. Idolaters are so reputed in the second commandment; and therefore it is not for those that love God to take delight in them, nor contract an intimacy with them. *Do not I hate those, saith David, that hate thee?* Psal. cxxxix. 21, 22. Those whom the grace of God dignified, ought not to debase themselves. Let God's people be of God's mind.

(2.) That God was displeased with him for doing this; *There is wrath upon thee, from before the Lord*, and thou must by repentance make thy peace with him, or it will be the worse for thee. He did so, and God's anger was turned away. Yet his trouble in the next chapter was a rebuke to him for meddling with strife that belonged not to him: If he be so fond of war, he shall have enough of it. And the great mischiefs which his seed after him fell into by the house of Ahab, was the just punishment of his affinity with that house.

(2.) Yet he takes notice of that which was praise-worthy, as it is convenient for us to do when we give a reproof, *ver. 3. There are good things found in thee*, and therefore, though God be displeased with thee, he doth not, he will not cast thee off. His abolishing idolatry with a heart fixed for God, and engaged to seek him, was a good thing which God accepted of, and would have him go on with for all this.

(4.) The return of duty which Jehoshaphat made to God for this favour. He took the reproof very well, was not wroth with the seer as his father was, but submitted. *Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness.* See what effect the reproof had upon him. (1.) He dwelt at Jerusalem, *ver. 4.* minded his own business at home, and would not expose himself by making any more such visits to Ahab. *Rebuke a wise man, and he will be yet wiser*, and will take warning, *Prov. ix. 8, 9.* (2.) To atone (as I may say) for that visit he made to Ahab, he made a pious profitable visitation of his own kingdom; he went out through the people in his own person, from Beerseba in the south to mount Ephraim in the north, and brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers, i. e. did all he could towards it. (1.) By what the prophet said, he perceived that his former attempts for reformation were well-pleasing to God, and therefore he revived them, and did what was then left undone. It is good when commendations thus quicken us to our duty, and the more we are praised for doing well, the more vigorous we are in well-doing. (2.) Perhaps he found that his late affinity with the idolatrous house of Ahab and kingdom of Israel, had had an ill influence upon his own kingdom; many, we may suppose, were emboldened to revolt to idolatry, when they saw even their reforming king so intimate with idolaters; and therefore he thought himself doubly obliged to do all he could to reduce them. It we truly repent of our sin, we will do our utmost to repair the damage we have any way done by it to religion, or the souls of others. We are particularly concerned to recover those that have fallen into sin, or been hardened in it by our example.

5. ¶ And he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city; 6. And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment. 7. Wherefore now, let the fear of the LORD be upon you, take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts. 8. ¶ Moreover, in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the LORD, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem. 9. And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. 10. And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the LORD, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren. this do, and ye shall not trespass. 11. And behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the LORD; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters; also the Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good.

Jehoshaphat having done what he could to make his people good, he is here providing, if possible, to keep them so by the influence of settled magistracy. He had sent preachers among them to instruct them, *chap. xvii. 7, 8, 9.* and that provision did well; but now he saw it farther requisite to send judges among them, to see the laws put in execution, and to be a terror to evil doers. It is very likely there were judges up and down the country before, but either they neglected their business, or the people slighted them, so that the end of the institution was not answered; and therefore it was necessary, it should be new modeled, new men employed, and a new charge given them. That is it which is here done.

1. He erected inferior courts of justice in the several cities of the kingdom, *ver. 5.* The judges of these courts were to keep the people in the worship of God, to punish the violations of the law, and to decide controversies between man and man. Here is the charge he gave them, *ver. 6.* In it we have,

(1.) The means he prescribes to them for the keeping of them close to their duty, and those are two. (1.) Great caution and circumspection: *Take heed what ye do*, *ver. 6.* And again, *Take heed and do it*, *ver. 7.* Mind your business; take heed of making any mistakes; be afraid of misunderstanding any point of law, or the matter of fact. Judges, of all men, have need to be cautious, because so much depends upon their taking a thing right. (2.) Great piety and religion: *Let the fear of God be upon you*,

that will be a restraint upon you to keep you from doing wrong, *Neh. v. 15. Gen. xlii. 19.* and an engagement to you to be active in doing the duty of your place. Let destruction from God be a terror to them, as Job speaks, *Job xxxi. 23.* and then they will be a terror to none but evil doers.

(2.) The motives he would have them consider, to engage them to faithfulness: And these are three, all taken from God. (1.) That from him they had their commission; his ministers they were. The powers that be are ordained by him, and for him. *Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord*; your business is to glorify him, and serve the interests of his kingdom among men. (2.) That his eye was upon them: He is *with you in the judgment*, to take notice what you do, and call you to an account if you do amiss. (3.) That he is the great example of justice to all magistrates, *There is no iniquity with him*, no bribery, nor respect of persons. Magistrates are called gods, and therefore must endeavour to resemble him.

2. He erected a supreme court at Jerusalem, which was advised with, and appealed to in all the difficult causes that occurred in the inferior courts, and which gave judgment upon demurrers, (to speak in the language of our own law) special verdicts, and writs of error. This court sat in Jerusalem, for there was yet the throne of judgment, there they would be under the inspection of the king himself. Observe,

1. The causes cognizable in this court; and they were of two kinds, as with us. 1. Pleas of the crown, called here *the judgment of the Lord*, because the law of God was the law of the realm: All criminals were charged with the breach of some or other law of his, and were said to offend against his peace, his crown and dignity. 2. Common pleas, between party and party, called here *controversies*, *ver. 8.* and *causes of their brethren*, *ver. 10.* differences between blood and blood: This refers to *Deut. xxi. 8.* between the blood of the person slain and the blood of the manlayer. Since the revolt of the ten tribes, all the cities of refuge, except Hebron, belonged to the kingdom of Israel, and therefore we may suppose the courts of the temple or the horns of the altar were chiefly used as sanctuaries in that case, and therefore the trial of homicides was referred for the court at Jerusalem. If the inferior judges did not agree about the sense of any law or commandment, any statute or judgment, this court must determine the controversy.

2. The judges of this court were some of the Levites and priests that were most learned in the law, eminent for wisdom, and of approved integrity, and some of the chief of the fathers of Israel; peers of the realm, as I may call them, or persons of age and experience, that had been men of business, who would be the most competent judges of matters of fact, as the priests and Levites were of the sense of the law.

3. The two chiefs, or presidents of this court. Amariah the high-priest was to preside in ecclesiastical causes, to direct the court, and be the mouth of it, or perhaps to be last consulted in cases which the judges themselves doubted of: And Zebadiah, the prime minister of that state, in all civil causes, *ver. 11.* Thus there are diversities of gifts and operations, but all from the same Spirit, and for the good of the body. Some understand best the matters of the Lord, others the king's matters; neither can say to the other, I have no need of thee, for God's Israel has need of both; and as every one hath received the gift, so let him minister the same. Blessed be God both for magistrates and ministers; scribes and statesmen; men of books, and men of business.

4. The inferior officers of the court, some of the Levites (such as had not parts to qualify them for judges) shall be officers before you, *ver. 11.* They were to bring causes into the court, and to see the sentence of the judges executed. And these hands and feet were as necessary in their places, as eyes and heads, the judges in theirs.

5. The charge which the king gave them. (1.) They must see to it that they acted from a good principle; must do all in the fear of the Lord, setting him always before them, and then they would act faithfully, conscientiously, and with a perfect upright heart, *ver. 9.* (2.) They must make it their great and constant care to prevent sin, to warn the people that they trespass not against the Lord, possess them with a dread of sin, not only as hurtful to themselves and the public peace, but as an offence to God, and that which would bring wrath upon the people if they committed it, and upon the magistrates if they did not punish it. *This do and ye shall not trespass*; this implies, that those who have power in their hands contract the guilt of sin themselves, if they do not use their power for the preventing and restraining of sin in others. You trespass if you do not keep them from trespassing. (3.) They must act with resolution. Deal courageously, and fear not the face of man; be bold and daring in the discharge of your duty, and whoever is against you, God will protect you. *The Lord shall be with the good.* Wherever he finds a good man, a good magistrate, he will be found a good God.

C H A P. XX.

We have here, (1.) The great danger and distress that Jehoshaphat and his kingdom were in from a foreign invasion, *ver. 1, 2.* (2.) The pious course he took for their safety, by fasting and praying, and seeking God, *ver. 3—13.* (3.) The assurance which God by a prophet immediately gave them of victory, *ver. 14—17.* (4.) Their thankful believing reception of those assurances, *ver. 18—21.* (5.) The defeat which God gave to their enemies thereupon, *ver. 22—25.* (6.) A solemn thanksgiving which they kept for their victory, and for the happy consequences of it, *ver. 26—30.* (7.) The conclusion of the reign of Jehoshaphat, not without some blemishes, *ver. 31—37.*

1. IT came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other besides the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. 2. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria, and behold they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is Engedi. 3. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4. And Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD: 5. ¶ And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, 6. And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power

power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? 7. *Art* not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? 8. And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, 9. If *when* evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then wilt thou hear and help. 10. And now behold, the children of Ammon, and Moab, and mount Seir, whom thou wouldst not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not: 11. Behold, *I say*, how they reward us, to come and cast us, out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. 12. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us: neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee. 13. And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

We left Jehoshaphat in the foregoing chapter very well employed in reforming his kingdom, and providing for the due administration of justice, and support of religion in it, and expected nothing but to hear of the peace and prosperity of his reign; but here we have him in distress, yet that in order to such a glorious deliverance as was an abundant recompence for his piety. If we meet with trouble in the way of duty, we may believe it is that God may have an opportunity of shewing us so much the more of his marvelous loving kindness. We may here,

1. A formidable invasion of Jehoshaphat's kingdom by the Moabites and Ammonites, and their auxiliaries, *ver. 1.* and the surprising notice of it brought to Jehoshaphat, when they had already entered his country, *ver. 2.* What pretence they had to quarrel with Jehoshaphat doth not appear; they are said to come from beyond the sea, meaning the dead sea, where Sodom had stood. It should seem they marched through those of the ten tribes that lay beyond Jordan, and they gave them passage through their borders; so ungrateful were they to Jehoshaphat, who had lately put his hand to help them in recovering Ramoth-gilead. Several nations joined in this confederacy, but especially the children of Lot, whom the rest helped, *Psalm lxxxiii. 6, 7, 8.* The neighbour nations had feared Jehoshaphat, *chap. xvii. 10.* but perhaps his affinity with Ahab had lessened him in their esteem, and they had had some intimation that his God was displeased with him for it, which they fancied would give them an opportunity to make a prey of his kingdom.

2. The preparation Jehoshaphat made against the invaders. No mention is made of his mustering his forces, no doubt that was done, God must be trusted in the use of means. But his great care was to obtain the favour of God, and secure him on his side, which perhaps he was the more solicitous about, because he had been lately told, that there was *wrath upon him from before the Lord*, *chap. xix. 2.* But he is of the mind of his father David, if we must be corrected, yet let us not fall into the hands of man. (1.) He feared; conscious of guilt made him fear; those that have least sin are most sensible of it: The surprise added to the fright. Holy fear is a spur to prayer and preparation, *1 Pet. i. 7.* (2.) He set himself to seek the Lord, and in the first place to make him his friend. They that would seek the Lord so as to find him, and to find favour with him, must set themselves to seek him, must do it with fixedness of thought, sincerity of intention, with the utmost vigour and resolution to continue seeking him. (3.) He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah, appointed a day of humiliation and prayer, that they might join together in confessing their sins, and asking help of the Lord. Fasting from bodily refreshments upon such extraordinary occasions, is a token of self-judging for the sins we have committed, we own ourselves unworthy of the bread we eat, and that God might justly withhold it from us; and of self-denial for the future; fasting for sin implies a resolution to fast from it, though it has been to us as a sweet morsel. Magistrates are to call their people to the duty of fasting and prayer upon such occasions, that it may be a national act, and so may obtain national mercies. (4.) The people readily assembled out of all the cities of Judah in the court of the temple, to join in prayer, *ver. 4.* and they stood before the Lord, as beggars at his door, with their wives and children; they and their families were in danger, and therefore they bring them with them to seek the Lord. Lord, we are indeed a provoking people, that deserve to be abandoned to ruin, but here are little ones that are innocent, let not them perish in the storm. Nineveh was spared for the sake of the little ones, *Jonah iv. 11.* The place they met in was the house of the Lord, before the new court, that was perhaps lately added to the former courts; some think, that which was called the court of the women: thus they came within reach of that gracious promise which God made in answer to Solomon's prayer, *chap. vii. 15.* mine ears shall be attent to the prayer that is made in this place. Jehoshaphat himself was the mouth of the congregation to God, and did not devolve the work upon his chaplains. Though the kings were forbidden to burn incense, they were allowed to pray and preach; as Solomon, and Jehoshaphat here.

The prayer Jehoshaphat prayed upon this occasion is here recorded; or part of it, and an excellent prayer it is.

1. He acknowledgeth the sovereign dominion of the divine providence; gives to God the glory of it, and takes to himself the comfort of it, *ver. 6.* *Art thou not God in heaven?* no doubt thou art, which none of the gods of the heathen are; make it to appear then. Is not thy dominion supreme over kings themselves, and universal over all kingdoms, even those of the heathen that know thee not? Control these heathen then; set bounds to their daring, threatening insults. Is there not in thy hand that power and might which none is able to withstand? Lord, exert it on our behalf. Glorify thine own omnipotence.

2. He lays hold on their covenant-relation to God and interest in him. Thou art God in heaven, art the God of our fathers, *ver. 6.* and our God, *ver. 7.* Whom should we seek to, whom should we trust to for relief, but to the God we have chosen and served?

3. He shews the title they had to this good land they were now in possession of; an indisputable title it was, thou gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend. He was thy friend, this is referred to, *James ii. 23.* to shew the honour of Abraham, that he was called the friend of God; we are his seed; and hope to be beloved for the father's sake; *Rom. xi. 28.* *Deut. vii. 9.* We hold this land by grant from thee. Lord maintain thine own grant,

and warrant it against all unjust claims. Suffer us not to be cast out of the possession, we are tenants, thou art our landlord, wilt thou not hold those own? *ver. 11.* They that use what they have for God, may comfortably hope that he will secure it to them.

4. He makes mention of the sanctuary, the temple they had built for God's name, *ver. 8.* not as if that merited any thing at God's hand, for of his own they gave him, but it was such a token of God's favourable presence with them; as that they had promised themselves he would hear and help them when in their distress they cried to him before that house, *ver. 8, 9.* Lord, when it was built, it was intended for the encouragement of our faith at such a time as this. Here thy name is, here we are, Lord help us for the glory of thy name.

5. He pleads the ingratitude and injustice of his enemies; we are such as it will be thy glory to appear for; they are such as it will be thy glory to appear against; for (1.) They ill requite our ancient kindnesses. Thou wouldst not let Israel invade them, nor give them any disturbance, *Deut. ii. 5, 9, 19.* Meddle not with the Edomites, distress not the Moabites, come not nigh the children of Ammon, no not though they provoke you: yet now see how they invade us. We may comfortably appeal to God against those that render us evil for good. (2.) They break in upon our ancient rights. They come to cast us out of our possessions, and seize our land for themselves, O our God, wilt thou not judge them? *ver. 12.* Wilt thou not give sentence against them, and execute it upon them? The justice of God is the refuge of those that are wronged.

6. He professeth his entire dependence upon God for deliverance; though he had a great army on foot, and well disciplined, yet (saith he) we have no might against this great company, none without thee, none that we can expect any thing from without thy special presence and blessing, none to boast of, none to trust to, but our eyes are upon thee, we rely upon thee, and from thee is all our expectation. The disease seems desperate, we know not what to do, are quite at a loss, in a great strait, but this is a sovereign remedy, our eyes are upon thee, an eye of acknowledgment and humble submission, an eye of faith and entire dependence, an eye of desire and hearty prayer, an eye of hope and patient expectation. In thee, O God, do we put our trust: our souls wait on thee.

14. ¶ Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation: 15. And he said, Harken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid, nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. 16. To-morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz, and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. 17. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to-morrow go out against them, for the LORD will be with you. 18. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head, with his face to the ground: and all Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. 19. And the Levites of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high.

We have here God's gracious answer to Jehoshaphat's prayer; and it was a speedy answer: while he was yet speaking, God heard: before the congregation was dismissed, they had assurance given them that they should be victorious, for it is never in vain to seek God.

1. The Spirit of prophecy came upon a Levite that was present, not in place of eminency, but in the midst of the congregation, *ver. 14.* The Spirit like the wind blows where he listeth, and on whom. He was of the sons of Asaph, and therefore one of the singers, on that office God would put an honour. Whether he was a prophet before this or no is uncertain, most probably he was, which would make him the more regarded. There needed no sign, the thing itself was to be performed the very next day, and that would be confirmation enough to his prophecy.

2. He encouraged them to trust in God, though the danger was very threatening, *ver. 15.* Be not afraid you have admitted fear enough to bring you to God, now admit not that which will drive you from him again; The battle is not yours, it is not in your own strength, nor for your own cause that you engage, the battle is God's, he doth and will, as you have desired, interest himself in the cause.

3. He gives them intelligence of the motions of the enemy, and orders them to march towards them, with particular directions where they should find them. To-morrow (the day after the fast) go ye down against them, *ver. 16, 17.* It is fit he that commands the deliverance, should command those for whom the deliverance is to be wrought; and give the necessary orders, both for time and place.

5. He assures them not that they should be the glorious instruments, but the joyful spectators of the total defeat of the enemy. You shall not need to strike a stroke, the work shall be done to your hands, only stand still and see it, *ver. 17.* As Moses said to Israel at the Red-sea, *Exod. xiv. 13.* God is with you, who is able to do his work himself, and will do it. If the battle be his, the victory shall be his too. Let but the Christian soldier go out against his spiritual enemies, and the god of peace will tread them under his feet, and make him more than a conqueror.

5. Jehoshaphat and his people received these assurances with faith, reverence and thankfulness. (1.) They bowed their heads. Jehoshaphat first, and then all the people, fell before the Lord, and worshipped; receiving with a holy awe and fear of God this token of his favour, and saying with faith, Be it unto us according to thy word. (2.) They lifted up their voices in praise to God, *ver. 19.* An active faith can give thanks for a promise, though it be not yet performed, knowing that God's bonds are as good as ready money; God hath spoken in his holiness. I will rejoice, *Psal. lx. 6.*

20. ¶ And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood, and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your

your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. 21. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD, for his mercy endureth for ever. 22. ¶ And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. 23. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. 24. And when Judah came toward the watch-tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. 25. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels (which they stripped off for themselves) more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much. 26. ¶ And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there they blessed the LORD: therefore the name of the same place was called the valley of Berachah, unto this day. 27. Then they returned every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in the fore-front of them, to go again to Jerusalem with joy: for the LORD had made them to rejoice over their enemies. 28. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries, and harps, and trumpets, unto the house of the LORD. 29. And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. 30. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest round about.

We have here the foregoing prayer answered, and the foregoing promise performed, in the total overthrow of the enemies' forces, and the triumph (for so it was rather than a victory) of Jehoshaphat's forces over them.

1. Never was army drawn out to the field of battle so as Jehoshaphat's army was. He had soldiers ready prepared for war, chap. xvii. 18. but here is no notice taken of their military equipment, their swords or spears, their shields or bows. But Jehoshaphat took care, (1.) That faith should be their armour; as they went forth, instead of calling them to handle their arms, and stand to them, to keep ranks, observe orders, and fight valiantly, he bids them believe in the Lord God, and give credit to his word in the mouth of his prophets, and then they should prosper and be established, ver. 20. That is true courage which faith inspires a man with; nor will any thing contribute more to the establishing of the heart in shaking times, than a firm belief of the power and mercy and promise of God. The heart is fixed that thus trusteth in the Lord, and is kept in perfect peace. In our spiritual conflicts, this is the victory, this is the prosperity, even our faith.

(2.) That praise and thanksgiving should be their van-guard, ver. 21. Jehoshaphat called a council of war, and it was resolved, to appoint singers to go out before the army, to charge in the front, who had nothing else to do but to praise God, to praise his holiness, which is his beauty; to praise him as they did in the temple, that beauty of holiness, with that good old doxology which eternity itself will not wear thread-bare, *Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever.* By this strange advance towards the field of battle, Jehoshaphat intended to express his firm reliance upon the word of God, which enabled him to triumph before the battle, to animate his own soldiers, to confound the enemy, and to engage God on their side; for praise pleaseth God better than all burnt-offering and sacrifice.

2. Never was army so unaccountably destroyed as that of the enemy; not by thunder or hail, or the sword of an angel, not by dint of sword, or strength of arm, or any surprising alarm, like that which Gideon gave the Midianites, but the Lord set ambushments against them, either hosts of angels, or as Bishop Patrick thinks, their own ambushments, whom God struck with such confusion, that they fell upon their own friends as if they had been enemies, and so they all went together by the ears, and no body knew why or wherefore. This God did when his people began to sing and to praise, ver. 22. for he delights to furnish those with matter for praise that have hearts for it. We read of his being angry at the prayers of his people, Psal. lxxx. 4. but never at their praises. When they did but begin the work of praise, God perfected the work of their deliverance. What ground there was for their jealousies one of another doth not appear, perhaps there was none; but so it was that the Ammonites and the Moabites fell foul upon the Edomites and cut them off, and then they fell out one with another, and cut one another off, ver. 23. Thus God often makes wicked people instruments of destruction to one another; and what alliances can be so firm as to keep those together, whom God designs to dash in pieces one against another? And see the mischievous consequences of divisions which neither of the contending parties can give any good account of the reason of. Those are wretchedly insatuated to their ruin, that fall foul upon their friends as if they were enemies.

3. Never was spoil so cheerfully divided, for Jehoshaphat's army had nothing to do but that; the rest was done for them. When they came to the view of this vast army, instead of finding living men to fight with, they found them all dead men, and their carcases spread as dung upon the face of the earth, ver. 24. See how rich God is in mercy to them that call upon him in truth, and how often he out-does the prayers and expectations of his people. Jehoshaphat and his people prayed to be delivered from being spoiled by the enemy; and God not only did that, but enriched them with the spoil of the enemy. The plunder of the field was very great and very rich; they found precious jewels with the dead bodies, which yet could not save them from being loathsome carcases; the spoil was more than they could carry away at once, and they were three days in gathering it, ver. 25. Now it appeared what was God's end in bringing this great army against Judah, it was to humble them and prove them, that he might do them good in their

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latter end. It seemed at first a disturbance to their reformation, but it proves a recompence of it.

4. Never was victory celebrated with more solemn and enlarged thanksgiving. (1.) They kept a day of praise in the camp before they drew their forces out of the field. Many thanksgivings, no doubt, were offered up to God immediately; but on the fourth day they assembled in a valley; where they blessed God with so much zeal and fervency, that that day's work gave a name to the place, the valley of Berachah, i. e. of blessing, ver. 26. The remembrance of this work of wonder was hereby perpetuated for the encouragement of succeeding generations to trust in God. (2.) Yet they did not think this enough, but came in solemn procession, all in a body, and Jehoshaphat at the head of them, to Jerusalem, that the country as they passed along might join with them in their praises, and that they might give thanks for the mercy there where they had by prayer obtained it, in the house of the Lord, ver. 27, 28. Praising God must not be the work of a day only; but our praises when we have received mercy, must be often repeated, as our prayers were when we were in the pursuit of it. Every day we must bless God; as long as we live, and while we have any being we must praise him, spending our time in that work in which we hope to spend our eternity. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments, in the courts of the Lord's house, Psal. cxvi. 19.

5. Never did victory turn to a better account than this, for (1.) Jehoshaphat's kingdom was hereby made to look very great and considerable abroad, ver. 29. When they heard that God fought thus for Israel, they could not but say, *There is none like unto the God of Jehoram, and happy art thou, O Israel!* It begat in the neighbours a reverence of God, and a cautious fear of doing any injury to his people. It is dangerous fighting against those who have God with them. (2.) It was made very easy and quiet at home, ver. 30. They were quiet among themselves: Those that were displeased at the destroying of the images and groves, were now satisfied, and obliged to own that since the God of Israel could deliver after this sort, he only is to be worshipped, and in that way only which himself has appointed. They were also quiet from the fear of insults from their neighbours, God having given them rest round about. And if he give rest, who can give disturbance?

31. ¶ And Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: he was thirty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and five years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 32. And he walked in the way of Aha his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the LORD: 33. Howbeit, the high places were not taken away; for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers. 34. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel. 35. ¶ And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: 36. And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. 37. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Maresnah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

We are now drawing towards the close of the history of Jehoshaphat's reign, for a farther account of which, they who lived when this book was published, were referred to an authentic history of it, written by Jehu the prophet, chap. xix. 2. which was then extant, ver. 34. This was the general character of his reign, that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; kept close to the worship of God himself, and did what he could to keep his people close to it. But two things are here to be lamented,

1. That the people still retained a kindness for the high places, ver. 33. Those that were erected to the honour of strange gods were taken away, chap. xvii. 6. but those where the true God was worshipped, being less culpable, were thought allowable, and Jehoshaphat was loth to disoblige the people so far as to take them away, for as yet they had not prepared their hearts to the God of their fathers. They complied with Jehoshaphat's reformation, because they could not for shame do otherwise, but they were not hearty in it, did not direct their hearts to God in it, did not act in it from any good principle, nor with any zeal or resolution: And the best magistrates cannot bring to pass what they would in reformation, when the people are cool in it.

2. That Jehoshaphat himself still retained a kindness for the house of Ahab, because he had married his son to a daughter of that family, though he had been plainly reprov'd for it, and had like to have smarted for it. He saw and knew that Ahaziah the son of Ahab did very wickedly, and therefore could not expect to prosper; yet he joined himself with him, not in war as with his father, but in trade, went partner with him in an East-India fleet bound for Ophir, ver. 35, 36. There is an emphasis laid upon the time, after this, after God had done such great things for him, without any such scandalous and pernicious confederacies, gives him not only victory, but wealth; yet after this to go and join himself with a wicked king, was very ungrateful. After God had given him such a deliverance as this, should he again break God's commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations! What could he expect but that God should be angry with him? Ezra ix. 13, 14. Yet he sends to him to shew him his error, and bring him to repentance, (1.) By a prophet, who foretold the blasting of his project, ver. 37. And (2.) by storm which broke the ships in the port before they set sail, by which he was warned to break off his alliance with Ahaziah, and it seems he took the warning for when Ahaziah afterwards pressed him to join with him he would not, 1 Kings xxii. 49. See how pernicious a thing it is to join in friendship and society with evil-doers, it is a hard matter to break off from it. A man may much better keep himself from being taken in the snare, than recover himself out of it.

C H A P. XXI.

Never sure did any kingdom change its king so much for the worse as Judah did, when Jehoram, one of the vilest, succeeded Jehoshaphat one of the best. Thus were they punished for not making a better use

of Jehoshaphat's good government, and their disaffectedness, or coldness at least to his reformation, chap. xx. 33. They that knew not how to value a good king, are justly plagued with a bad one. Here is, (1.) Jehoram's elevation to the throne, ver. 1—3. (2.) The wicked course he took to establish himself in it by the murder of his brethren, ver. 4. (3.) The idolatries, and other wickedness he was guilty of, ver. 5, 6, 11. (4.) The prophecy of Elijah against him, ver. 12—15. (5.) The judgments of God upon him in the revolt of his subjects from him, ver. 8—10. and the success of his enemies against him, ver. 16, 17. (6.) His miserable sickness and inglorious exit, ver. 18—20. (7.) The preservation of the house of David for all this, ver. 7.

1. **N**OW Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead. 2. And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shepatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3. And their father gave them great gifts of silver and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the first-born. 4. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel. 5. ¶ Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD. 7. Howbeit the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and as he promised to give a light to him, and to his sons for ever. 8. ¶ In his days the Edomites revolted from under the dominion of Judah, and made themselves a king. 9. Then Jehoram went forth with his princes, and all his chariots with him: and he rose up by night, and smote the Edomites which compassed him in, and the captains of the chariots. 10. So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand: because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers. 11. Moreover, he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto.

We find here,

1. That Jehoshaphat was a very careful indulgent father to Jehoram. He had many sons, who are here named, ver. 2. and it is said here, ver. 13. they were better than Jehoram, had a great deal more wisdom and virtue, and lived up to their education, which he went counter to. They were very hopeful, and any of them more fit for the crown than he; and yet because he was the first-born, ver. 3. his father secured the kingdom to him and portioned his brethren, and disposed of them so as that they would be easy, and give him no disturbance, as Abraham when he made Isaac his heir, dismissed his other children with gifts. Herein Jehoshaphat was very kind and fair to his son, which might have obliged him to be respectful to him, and tread in the steps of so good a father: But it is no new thing for the children that have been most indulged by their parents, to be least dutiful to them. But whether in doing this he acted wisely and well for his people, and was just to them, I cannot say. His birth-right entitled him to a double portion of his father's estate, Deut. xxi. 17. But if he appeared utterly unfit for government (the end of which is the good of the people) and likely to undo all that his father had done, it had been better perhaps to have set him aside, and take the next that was hopeful and not inclined as he was to idolatry. Power is a sacred thing, with which men may either do much good or much hurt; and therefore *detur digniori. Salus populi suprema lex.*

2. That Jehoram was a most barbarous brother to his father's sons. As soon as he had settled himself in the throne, he slew all his brethren with the sword, either by false accusation under colour of law, or rather by assassination; by some wicked hand or other he got them all murdered; pretending (it is likely) that he could not think himself safe in the government till they were taken out of the way. Those that mean ill themselves, are commonly without cause jealous of those about them: The wicked fear where no fear is, or pretend to do so to give umbrage to their malice. It is likely, Jehoram hated his brethren and slew them for the same reason that Cain hated Abel and slew him, because their piety condemned his impiety, and won them that esteem with the people which he had lost. With them he slew divers of the princes of Israel who adhered to them or were likely to revenge their death. The princes of Judah, those who had taught the good knowledge of the Lord, chap. xvii. 7. are here called princes of Israel as before fathers of Israel, chap. xix. 8. because they were Israelites indeed, men of integrity. The sword which the good father had put into their hands, this wicked son sheathed in their bowels. Wo unto him that thus *foundeth a kingdom in blood*, Hab. ii. 12. it will prove a foundation that will sink the superstructure.

3. That Jehoram was a most wicked king that corrupted and debauched his kingdom, ruined the reformation that his good father and grandfather had carried on: he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, ver. 6. made high places which the people were of themselves too forward to make, and did his utmost to set up idolatry again, ver. 11. (1.) As for the inhabitants of Jerusalem where he kept his court, he easily drew them into his spiritual whoredom; he caused them to commit fornication, seducing them to eat things sacrificed to idols, Rev. ii. 20. (2.) The country people seem to have been more hardly brought to it; but they that would not be corrupted by flatteries, were driven by force to partake in his abominable idolatries, he compelled Judah thereto. He used his power for the destruction of the church, which was given him for the edification of it.

4. That when he forsook God and his worship, his subjects withdrew

from their allegiance to him. (1.) Some of the provinces abroad did so that were tributaries to him. The Edomites revolted, ver. 8. and though, he chastised them, ver. 9. yet he could not reduce them, ver. 10. (2.) One of the cities of his own kingdom did so. Libnah revolted, ver. 10. and set up for a free state, as of old it had a king of its own, Josh. xii. 15. And the reason is here given, not only why God permitted it, but why they did it, they shook off his government, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers, was become an idolater and a worshipper of false gods, and they could not continue subject to him; without some danger of being themselves also drawn away from God and their duty. While he adhered to God, they adhered to him; but when he cast God off, they cast him off. Whether this reason will justify them in their revolt or no, it will justify God's providence which ordered it so.

5. That yet God was tender of his covenant with the house of David, and therefore would not destroy the royal family, though it was so wretchedly corrupted and degenerated, ver. 7. These things we had before, 2 Kings viii. 19—22. The tenor of the covenant was, that David's seed should be visited for their transgressions, but the covenant should never be broken. Psal. lxxix. 30, &c.

12. ¶ And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13. But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: 14. Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods. 15. And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out, by reason of the sickness day by day. 16. ¶ Moreover, the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians that were near the Ethiopians. 17. And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz the youngest of his sons. 18. And after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels, with an incurable disease. 19. And it came to pass that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases: And his people made no burning for him like the burning of his fathers. 20. Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired: howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.

Here is, 1. A warning from God sent to Jehoram by writing from Elijah the prophet. By this it appears that Jehoram came to the throne and shewed himself what he was before Elijah's translation: It is true, we find Elisha attending Jehoshaphat, and described to be he that poured water on the hands of Elijah, after the story of Elijah's translation, 2 Kings iii. 11. but that might be, and that description given of him while Elijah was yet on earth; and it is certain, that history is put out of its proper place, for we read of Jehoshaphat's death, and Jehoram's coming to the crown, before we read of Elijah's translation, 1 Kings xxii. 50. We will suppose the time of his departure was at hand, so that he could not go in person to Jehoram, but hearing of his great wickedness in murdering his brethren, he left this writing it is probable with Elisha, to be sent him by the first opportunity, that it might either be a means to reclaim him or a witness against him, that he was fairly told what would be in the end hereof. The message is sent him in the name of the Lord God of David his father, ver. 12. upbraiding him with his relation to David, as that which, though it was his honour, was an aggravation of his degeneracy.

(1.) His crimes are plainly charged upon him. His departure from the good ways of God, in which he had been educated, and which he had been directed and encouraged to walk in by the example of his good father and grandfather, who lived and died in peace and honour, ver. 12. His conformity to the ways of the house of Ahab, that impious scandalous family; his setting up and enforcing idolatry in his kingdom, and murdering his brethren because they were better than himself, ver. 13. These are the heads of the indictment against him.

(2.) Judgment is given against him for these crimes, he is plainly told, that his sin should certainly be the ruin, (1.) Of his kingdom and family, ver. 14. With a heavy stroke, even that of war and captivity, will the Lord smite thy people and thy children, &c. Bad men bring God's judgments upon all about them. His people justly suffer, because they had complied with his idolatry, and his wives, because they had drawn him to it. (2.) Of his health and life. Thou shalt have great sickness, very painful and tedious, and mortal at last, ver. 15. This he is warned of before that his blood might be on his head, the watchman had delivered his soul; and that when these things so particularly foretold come to pass, it might appear they did not come by chance, but as the punishment of his sins, and were so intended. And now if, as he had learned of Ahab to do wickedly, he had but learned of Ahab to have humbled himself upon the receipt of his threatening message from Elijah; if, like him, (1 Kings xxi. 27.) he had rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted, who knows but, like him, he might have obtained at least a reprieve? But it doth not appear that he took any notice of it, he threw it by as waste-paper; Elijah seemed to him as one that mocked. But they that will not believe, shall feel.

2. The judgments threatened are brought upon him because he slighted the warning. No marvel hardened sinners are not frightened from sin, and to repentance, by the threatenings of misery in another world, that is future and out of sight, when the certain prospect of misery in this world, the sinking of their estates and the ruin of their healths, will not restrain them from vicious courses.

1. See Jehoram here stripped of all his comforts. God stirred up the spirit of his neighbours against him, who had loved and feared Jehoshaphat but hated and despised him, looking upon it as a scandalous thing for a nation

nation to change their gods. Some occasion or other they took to quarrel with him, invaded his country, but as it should seem fought neither against small nor great but the king's house only, they made directly to that, and carried away all the substance that was found in it; no mention is made of their carrying any away captive, but the king's wives and his sons, ver. 17. Thus God made it evident, that the controversy was with him and his house. Here it is only said, they carried away his sons; but we find chap. xxii. 1. that they *flew them all*. Blood for blood. He had slain all his brethren to strengthen himself, and now all his sons are slain, but one; and so he is weakened. If he had not been of the house of David, that one had not escaped; when Jeroboam's house, and Baasha's, and Ahab's were destroyed, there were none left; but David's house must not be wholly extirpated, though sometimes wretchedly degenerated, because a blessing was in it; no less a blessing than that of the Messiah.

2. See him tormented with *fore diseases and of a long continuance*, such as were threatened in the law against those that would not fear the Lord their God, Deut. xxviii. 58, 59. His disease was very grievous, it lay in his bowels, a continual griping of the guts; with that there was a complication of other fore diseases: it was very tedious, two years he continued ill, and I could get no relief; for his disease was incurable, though he was in the prime of his life, not forty years old. Asa whose heart was perfect with God, though in some instances he slept aside, was diseased only in his feet; but Jehoram, whose heart was wicked, was struck in his inwards; and he that had no bowels of compassion towards his brethren, was so plagued in his bowels that they fell out. Even good men, and those that are very dear to God, may be afflicted with diseases of this kind, but to them there are fatherly chastisements; and by the support of divine consolations the soul may dwell at ease even then when the body lies in pain. These fore diseases seized him just after his house was plundered, and his wives and children carried away. (1.) Perhaps his grief and anguish of mind for that calamity might occasion his sickness, or at least contribute to the heightening of it. (2.) By his sickness he was disabled to do any thing for the recovery of them, or the revenge of the injury done him. (3.) It added no doubt very much to his grief in his sickness, that he wanted the society of his wives and children, and that all the substance of his house was carried away. To be sick and poor, sick and solitary, but especially to be sick and in sin, sick and under the curse of God, sick and to have no grace to bear it with, no inward comfort to balance it with, is a most deplorable case.

3. See him buried in disgrace. He reigned but eight years, and then departed without being desired, ver. 20. nobody valued him while he lived, none lamented him when he died, but wished never greater loss to come to Jerusalem. To shew what little affection or respect they had for him, they would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, as thinking him unworthy to be numbered among them, who had kinged it so ill. The excluding of his body from the sepulchres of his fathers might be ordered by providence, as an intimation of the everlasting separation of the souls of the wicked after death from the spirits of just men. This farther disgrace they put upon him, that they made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers, ver. 19. His memory was far from being sweet and precious to them, and therefore they did not honour it with any sweet odours or precious spices, though we may suppose his dead body after so long and loathsome a disease needed something to perfume it. The generality of the people though prone enough to idolatry, yet had no true kindness for their idolatrous kings. Wickedness and profaneness make men despicable, even in the eyes of those who have but little religion themselves, whilst natural conscience itself often gives honour to those who are truly pious. They that despised God shall be lightly esteemed, as Jehoram was.

C H A P. XXII.

We read in the foregoing chapter of the carrying away of Jehoram's sons and his wives; but here we find one of his sons and one of his wives left, his son Ahaziah, and his wife Athaliah, both reserved to be the shame and plague of his family. (1.) Ahaziah was the shame of it as a partaker. (1.) In the sin, and (2.) In the destruction of the house of Ahab, ver. 1—9. (2.) Athaliah was the plague of it, for she destroyed all the seed-royal, and usurped the throne, ver. 10, 11, 12.

1. **A**ND the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son, king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp, had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. 2. Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem: his mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. 3. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. 4. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD, like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father, to his destruction. 5. ¶ He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel, to war against Hazael king of Syria, at Ramoth-gilead; and the Syrians smote Joram. 6. And he returned to be healed in Jezreel because of the wounds which were given him at Ramah, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram king of Judah, went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab at Jezreel, because he was sick. 7. And the destruction of Ahaziah was of God by coming to Joram: for when he was come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the LORD had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. 8. And it came to pass that when Jehu was executing judgment upon the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah and the sons of the brethren of Ahaziah, that ministered to Ahaziah, he slew them. 9. And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him (for he was hid in Samaria) and brought him to Jehu: and when they had slain him, they buried

him, because (said they) he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who fought the LORD with all his heart. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom.

We have here an account of the reign of Ahaziah, a short reign, but of one year, yet long enough unless it had been better. He was called Jehoram, chap. xxi. 17. here Ahaziah, which is the same name and of the same signification, only the words of which it is compounded are transposed. He is here said to be forty-two years old when he began to reign, ver. 2. which could not be, for his father, his immediate predecessor, was but forty when he died; and it is said, 2 Kings viii. 26. that he was twenty-two years old when he began to reign. Some make this forty-two to be the age of his mother Athaliah, for in the original it is, *he was the son of forty-two years*, i. e. the son of a mother that was of that age, and justly is her age put for his reproach to him, because she managed him and did what she would, she in effect reigned, and he had little more than the title of king. Many good expositors are ready to yield this with some few more such difficulties to arise from the mistake of some transcriber, who put forty-two for twenty-two, and the copies by which the error should have been corrected might be lost. Many ancient translations read it here twenty-two. Few books are now printed without some errata, yet the authors do not disown them, nor are the errors of the press imputed to the author, but the candid reader amends them by the sense, or by comparing them with some other part of the work, as we may easily do this.

The history of Ahaziah's reign is briefly summed up in two clauses, ver. 3, 4. That his mother and her relations were his counsellors to do wickedly, and it was to his destruction.

1. He did wickedly. Though by a special providence of God he was preserved alive when all his brethren were slain, and reserved for the crown, notwithstanding he was the youngest of them; though the inhabitants of Jerusalem when they had buried his father ingloriously, made him king, in hopes he would take warning by that not to tread in his steps, but would do better for himself and his kingdom; yet he was not influenced by the favour either of God or man, but walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, did evil in the sight of the Lord, like them, ver. 3, 4. i. e. He worshipped the same false gods that they worshipped, Baalim and Atharoth, supposing (as the learned Bishop Patrick thinks) that by these names, or mediators, they might have easier access to the supreme Numen, the God of Israel, or that these they might report to at all times and for all matters, as being nearer at hand and not of so high a dignity, but of a middle nature between the immortal God and mortal men; deified heroes; so they worshipped them as the church of Rome doth saints and angels: That was bad enough, but I wish it were not worse; and am jealous that they looked upon Jehovah, the God of their fathers, to be altogether such a one as these of Baalim, and them to be as great and as good as he, and upon this account not more eligible than those; Baalim encouraged all manner of lewdness and sensuality in their worshippers, which the God of Israel strictly forbade.

2. He was counselled by his mother, and her relations, to do so. She was his counsellor, ver. 3. and so were they after the death of his father, ver. 4. While his father lived he took care to keep him to idolatry, but when he was dead the house of Ahab feared lest his father's miserable end should deter him from it, and therefore they were very industrious to keep him tight to it, and to make him seven times more a child of hell than themselves. The counsel of the ungodly is the ruin of a great many young people, when they are setting out in the world. This young prince might have had better advice if he had pleased, from the princes and the judges, the priests and Levites that had been famous in his good grandfather's time for teaching the knowledge of God; but the house of Ahab humoured him, and he walked after their counsel, gave up himself to be led by them, and did just as they would have him. Thus do they debase and destroy themselves that forsake the divine conduct.

3. He was counselled by them to destruction. So it proved. Those that counsel us to do wickedly, counsel us to our destruction; while they flatter and flatter and pretend friendship, they are really our worst enemies. They that debase young men destroy them. (1.) It was bad enough that they exposed him to the sword of the Syrians, drawing him to join with Joram king of Israel, in an expedition to Ramoth-gilead, where Joram was wounded; an expedition that was not for his honour. Those that give us ill counsel in the affairs of religion, if we take it, God may justly make them our counsellors to do foolishly in our own affairs. But that was not all.

(2.) By engaging him in an intimacy with Joram king of Israel, they involved him in the common ruin of the house of Ahab. He came on a visit to Joram, ver. 6. just at the time that Jehu was executing the judgment of God upon that idolatrous family, and to was cut off with them, ver. 7, 8, 9. Here, (1.) See and dread the mischief of bad company, and of joining in with sinners. If not the infection, yet let the destruction be feared; Come out from Babylon, that talling house, Rev. xviii. 6. (2.) See and acknowledge the justice of God. His providence brought Ahaziah just at this fatal juncture to see Joram, that he might fall with him, and be taken as in a snare. This we had an account of before, 2 Kings ix. 27, 28. It is here added, that he was decently buried, not as Jehoram, whose dead body was cast into Naboth's vineyard, 2 Kings ix. 26. and the reason given is, because he was the son, i. e. the grandson of good Jehoshaphat, who fought the Lord with his heart. Thus is he remembered with honour long after his death, and some respect shewed even to his degenerate unworthy seed for his sake. The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot.

10. ¶ But when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah. 11. But Jehoshabeath the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bed-chamber. So Jehoshabeath the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah) hid him from Athaliah, so that she slew him not. 12. And he was with them hid in the house of God six years, and Athaliah reigned over the land.

We have here what we had before, 2 Kings xi. 1, &c.

1. A wicked woman endeavouring to destroy the house of David, that she might set up a throne for herself upon the ruins of it. Athaliah barbarously cut off all the seed-royal, ver. 10. perhaps intending to transmit the crown of Judah after herself to some of her own relations, that though

though her family was cut off in Israel by Jehu, it might be planted in Judah.

2. A good woman effectually preserving it from being wholly extirpated. One of the late king's sons, a child of a year old, was rescued from among the dead, and saved alive by the care of Jehoiada's wife, ver. 11, 12. that a lump might be ordained for God's anointed; for no word of God shall fail to the ground.

C H A P. XXIII.

Six years bloody Athaliah had tyrannized; in this chapter we have her deposed and slain, and Josiah the rightful heir enthroned. We had the story before, much as it is here related, 2 Kings xi. 4. &c.

(1.) *Jehoiada prepared the people for the king, acquainted them with his design, armed them, and appointed them their posts,* ver. 1—10. (2.) *He produced the king to the people, crowned and anointed him,* ver. 11. (3.) *He slew the usurper,* ver. 12—15. (4.) *He reformed the kingdom, re-established religion, and restored the civil government,* ver. 16—21.

1. **A**ND in the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jehoram, and Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, and Azariah the son of Obed, and Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him. 2. And they went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. 3. And all the congregation made a covenant with the king in the house of God: and he said unto them, Behold the king's son shall reign, as the LORD hath said of the sons of David. 4. This is the thing that ye shall do: A third part of you entering on the sabbath of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters of the doors; 5. And a third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation: and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the LORD. 6. But let none come into the house of the LORD, save the priests, and they that minister of the Levites, they shall go in, for they are holy: but all the people shall keep the watch of the LORD. 7. And the Levites shall compass the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand, and whosoever elcometh into the house, he shall be put to death: but be ye with the king when he cometh in, and when he goeth out. 8. So the Levites and all Judah did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest had commanded, and took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that were to go out on the sabbath: for Jehoiada the priest dismissed not the courses. 9. Moreover, Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds, spears and bucklers, and shields, that had been king David's, which were in the house of God. 10. And he set all the people (every man having his weapon in his hand) from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and the temple, by the king round about, 11. Then they brought out the king's son, and put upon him, the crown, and gave him the testimony, and made him king: and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, God save the king.

We may well imagine the ill posture of affairs in Jerusalem during Athaliah's six years usurpation; and may wonder that God permitted it, and his people bore it so long. But after such a dark and tedious night the returning day in his revolution was the more bright, and the more welcome; the continuance of David's seed and throne was what God had sworn by his holiness, *Psal. lxxxix. 36.* and an interruption was no defeatance; the stream of government here runs again in the right channel. The instrument and chief manager of the restoration is Jehoiada.

1. He here appears to be a man of great conduct; that reserved the young prince for so many years till he was fit to appear in public, and till the nation was grown weary of the usurper; prepared his work before hand, and then effected it with admirable secrecy and expedition. When God has work to do, he will qualify and spirit men for it.

2. A man of great interest. The captains joined with him, ver. 1. The Levites and the chief of the fathers of Israel came at his call to Jerusalem, ver. 2. The Levites and all Judah did as Jehoiada commanded, ver. 8. and, which is strange, all that were intrusted with the secret kept their own counsel till it was executed. Thus the words of the wife are heard in quiet, *Ecclef. ix. 17.*

3. A man of great faith. It was not only common equity, much less his wife's relation to the royal family, that put him upon this undertaking, but a regard to the word of God, and the divine entail of the crown, ver. 3. The king's son shall reign as the Lord hath said. His eye to the promise, and dependence upon that, added a great deal of glory to this undertaking.

4. A man of great religion. This matter was to be done in the temple, which might occasion some breach of rule, and the necessity of the case might be thought to excuse it; but he gave special order that none of the people should come into the house of the Lord, but the priests and Levites only, who were holy, upon pain of death, ver. 6, 7. Never let sacred things be profaned, no not for the support of civil rights.

5. A man of great resolution; when he had undertaken this business he went through with it, brought out the king, crowned him and gave him the testimony, ver. 11. He ventured his head, but it was in a good cause, and therefore he went on boldly. It is here said, that his sons joined with him in anointing the young king, one of which, it is likely, was that Zecharias whom Josiah afterwards put to death for reproving him, chap. xxiv. 20. which was so much the more ungrateful, because he had actually a hand in anointing him.

12. ¶ Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of the LORD. 13. And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar, at the entering in, and the princes, and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music; and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, treason. 14. Then Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds that were set over the host, and said unto them, Have her forth of the ranges: and whoso followeth her, let him be slain with the sword. For the priest said, Slay her not in the house of the LORD. 15. So they laid hands on her; and when she was come to the entering of the horse-gate by the king's house, and slew her there. 16. ¶ And Jehoiada made a covenant between him, and between all the people, and between the king, that they should be the LORD's people. 17. Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars, and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal, before the altars. 18. Also Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the LORD by the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt-offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David. 19. And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the LORD: that none which was unclean in any thing should enter it. 20. And he took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the house of the LORD, and they came through the high gate into the king's house, and set the king upon the throne of the kingdom. 21. And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.

Here is, 1. The people are pleased, ver. 12, 13. when the king stood at his pillar, whose right it was to stand there, all the people of the land rejoiced to see a rod sprung out of the stem of Jesse, *Isai. xi. 1.* when it seemed a withered root in a dry ground, to see what they despaired of ever seeing, a king of the house of David, what a pleasing surprise was it to them! They ran in transports of joy to see this sight, praised the king, and praised God, for they had with them such as taught to sing praise.

2. Athaliah slain. She ran herself upon the point of the sword of justice; for imagining her interest much better than it was, she ventured into the house of the Lord at that time, and cried, *Treason, treason*, but nobody seconded her or sided with her; the pride of her heart deceived her; she thought all her own, whereas none were cordially so. Jehoiada, as protector in the king's minority, ordered her to be slain, ver. 14. which was done immediately, ver. 15. only care was taken that she should not be slain in the house of the Lord; that sacred place must not be so far disgraced, nor that wicked woman so far honoured.

3. The original contract agreed to, ver. 16. In the *Kings* it was said Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, the people, and the king, 2 *Kings* xi. 17. Here it is said to be between him, the people and the king, for he, as God's priest, was his representative in this transaction, or a sort of mediator as Moses was. The indenture was tripartite, but the true intent and meaning of the whole was, that they should be the Lord's people; God covenanted by Jehoiada to take them for his people; the king and people covenanted with him to be his; and the king covenanted with the people to govern them as the people of God, and the people with the king to be subject to him, as the Lord's people, in his fear and for his sake. Let us look upon ourselves and one another as the Lord's people, and it will have a mighty influence upon us in the discharge of all our duty both to God and man.

4. Baal destroyed, ver. 17. They had not done so much as half their work, if they had only destroyed the usurper of the king's right, and not the usurper of God's right; if they had asserted the honour of the throne and not that of the altar; the greatest grievance of Athaliah's reign was the bringing in the worship of Baal, and supporting of that; therefore that must be abolished in the first place. Down with Baal's house, his altars, his images; down with them all, and let the blood of his priests be mingled with his sacrifices; for God had commanded that seducers to idolatry should be put to death, *Deut. xiii. 5, 6.*

5. The temple service revived, ver. 18, 19. that had been neglected in the last reigns; the priest and the people wanting either power or zeal to keep it up, when they had princes that were disaffected to it. But Jehoiada put the offices of the house of the Lord into the proper course and proper hands again, which in the late times had been disturbed and invaded. (1.) He appointed the priests to their courses, for the due offering of sacrifices according to the law of Moses. (2.) The singers to theirs, according to the appointment of David. The sacrifices (it should seem) were offered with rejoicing and singing; and good reason; we joy in God when we receive the atonement, *Rom. v. 11.* (3.) The porters were put in their respective posts as David ordered, ver. 19. and their office was to take care that none who were upon any account ceremonially unclean should be admitted into the courts of the temple.

6. The civil government re-established, ver. 20. They brought the king in state to his own palace, and set him upon the throne of the kingdom, to give law, and give judgment, or his tutor for him. Thus was this happy revolution perfected, the generality of the people rejoiced in it, the rest were quiet and made no opposition, ver. 21. When the son of David is enthroned in the soul, all is quiet, and springs of joy are opened.

C H A P. XXIV.

We have here the history of the reign of Josiah, the progress, and especially the period of which, was not of a piece with its beginning, nor shone with so much lustre. How wonderfully he was preserved

preferred for the throne, and placed in it, we read before: now here we are told how he began in the spirit, but ended in the flesh. (1.) In the beginning of his time, while Jehoiada lived, he did well; particularly he took care to put the temple in good repair, ver. 1.—14. (2.) In the latter end of his time after Jehoiada's death he apostatized from God, and his apostacy was his ruin. (4.) He set up the worship of Baal again, ver. 15—18. though warned to the contrary, ver. 19. (2.) He put Zechariah the prophet to death, because he reproved him for it, ver. 20—22. (3.) The judgments of God came upon him for it. The Syrians invaded him, ver. 23, 24. He was struck with sore diseases; his own servants conspired against him and slew him; and, as a mark of infamy upon him, he was not buried in the burying-place of the kings, ver. 25, 26, 27.

1. **JOASH** was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem: his mother's name also was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. 2. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3. And Jehoiada took for him two wives, and he begat sons and daughters. 4. ¶ And it came to pass after this, that Joash was minded to repair the house of the LORD. 5. and he gathered together the priests and the Levites, and said to them, go out unto the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter: howbeit the Levites hastened it not. 6. And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the collection according to the commandment of Moses, the servant of the LORD, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness? 7. For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD did they bestow upon Baalim. 8. And at the king's commandment they made a chest and set it without, at the gate of the house of the LORD. 9. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the LORD, the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness. 10. And all the princes, and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. 11. Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office, by the hand of the Levites; and when they saw that there was much money: the king's scribe, and the high-priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. 12. And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the LORD, and also such as wrought iron and brass, to mend the house of the LORD. 13. So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them; and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it. 14. And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the LORD, even vessels to minister and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver: and they offered burnt-offerings in the house of the LORD continually, all the days of Jehoiada.

This account of Joash's good beginnings we had as it stands here, 2 Kings xii. 1, &c. though the latter part of this chapter concerning his apostacy, we had little of there. What is good in men we should take all occasions to speak of; and often repeat it; what is evil we should make mention of but sparingly, and no more than is needful.

We shall here only observe,

1. That it is a happy thing for young people when they are setting out in the world, to be under the direction and conduct of those that are wise and good, and faithful to them, as Joash was under the influence of Jehoiada, during whose time he did that which was right. Let those that are young reckon it a blessing to them, and not a burden and check upon them, to have those with them that will caution them against that which is evil, and advise and quicken them to that which is good: and let them reckon it not a mark of weakness and subjection, but of wisdom and discretion to hearken to such. He that will not be counselled cannot be helped. It is especially prudent for young people to take advice in their marriages, as Joash did, who left it to his guardian to choose him his wives; because Jezebel and Athaliah had been such plagues, ver. 3. That is a turn of life, which often proves either the making or marring of young people, and therefore should be done with great care.

2. Men may go far in the external performances of religion, and keep long to them, merely by the power of their education, and the influence of their friends, who yet have no hearty affection for divine things, nor any inward relish of them. Foreign inducements may push men on to that which is good, who are not actuated by a living principle of grace in their hearts.

3. In the shews of devotion it is possible those who have only the form of godliness may outstrip those that have the power of it: Joash is more solicitous and more zealous about the repair of the temple than Jehoiada himself.

self, whom he reproves for his remissness in that matter, ver. 6. It is easier to build temples than be temples to God.

4. The repairing of churches is a good work, which all in their places should promote, for the decency and conveniency of religious assemblies. The learned tell us, that in the Christian church anciently part of the tithes were applied that way.

5. Many a good work would be done that now lies undone, if there were but a few active men to stir in it and put it forward. When Joash found that money did not come in as he expected one way, he tried another way, and that answered the intention. Many have honesty enough to follow, that have not zeal enough to lead in that which is good. The throwing of money into a chest through a hole in the lid of it, was a way that had not been used before, and perhaps the very newness and oddness of the thing made it a successful expedient for the raising of money; a great deal was thrown in, and with a great deal of cheerfulness, they all rejoiced, ver. 10. An invention to please peoples humour may sometimes bring them to their duty. Wisdom herein is profitable to direct.

6. Faithfulness is the greatest praise, and will be the greatest comfort, of those that are intrusted with public treasure, or employed in public business. The king and Jehoiada faithfully paid the money to the workmen, who faithfully did the work, ver. 12, 13.

15. ¶ But Jehoiada waxed old, and was full of days when he died; an hundred and thirty years old was he when he died. 16. And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house. 17. Now after the death of Jehoiada, came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king: then the king hearkened unto them. 18. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. 19. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD, and they testified against them: but they would not give ear. 20. And the spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. 21. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the LORD. 22. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son; and when he died, he said, the LORD look upon it and require it. 23. ¶ And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. 24. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men: and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hands, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers: so they executed judgment against Joash. 25. And when they were departed from him (for they left him in great diseases) his own servants conspired against him, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died; and they buried him in the sepulchres of the kings. 26. And these are they that conspired against him; Zabad the son of Shimeath an Ammonitess, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith a Moabitess. 27. ¶ Now concerning his sons, and the greatness of the burdens laid upon him, and the repairing of the house of God, behold, they are written in the story of the book of the kings. And Amaziah his son reigned in his stead.

We have here a sad account of the degeneracy and apostacy of Joash. God had done great things for him; he had done something for God; but he proved ungrateful to his God, and false to the engagements he had laid himself under to him. *How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!* Here is,

1. The occasion of his apostacy; when he did that which was right, it was not with a perfect heart, he never was sincere, never acted from principle, but in compliance to Jehoiada, who had helped him to the crown, and because they had been protected in the temple, and rose upon the ruins of idolatry. And therefore when the wind turned, he turned with it.

(1.) His good counsellor left him, and was by death removed from him. It was a mercy to him and his kingdom that Jehoiada lived so long. One hundred and thirty years, ver. 15. By which it appears he was born in Solomon's time, and had lived six entire reigns before this. It was an encouragement to him to go on in that good way which Jehoiada had trained him up in, to see what honour was done to Jehoiada at his death; they buried him among the kings, with this honourable encomium, perhaps it was part of the inscription on his grave-stone, that he had done good in Israel. Judah is called Israel, because the other tribes have revolted from God, they only were Israelites indeed. Note, It is the greatest honour to do good in our generations; and those who do that which is good, shall have praise of the same. He had done good towards God, not that any man's goodness can extend unto him, but he had done good towards his house, in reviving the temple service, chap. xxiii. 8. Note, Those do the greatest good to the country, that lay out themselves in their places to promote religion. Well, Jehoiada finished his course with honour; but that little religion that Joash had was all buried in his grave, and after his death both

king and kingdom went all to naught. See how much sometimes one head holds up, and what a great judgment to any prince or people, the death of godly, zealous, useful men is: see how necessary it is, that, as our Saviour speaks, *we have salt in ourselves*, that we act in religion from an inward principle, which will carry us on through all changes. Then the loss of a parent, a minister, a friend, will not be the losing of our religion.

(2.) Bad counsellors got about him, insinuated themselves into his affections, wheedled him, flattered him, *made obedience to him*, and instead of condoling, congratulated him upon the death of his old tutor, as his release from the discipline he had been so long under, unworthy a man, a king: they tell him he must be priest-ridden no longer, he is now discharged from *grave lessons and restraints*, he may do as he pleaseth: and (would you think it?) the princes of Judah were the men that were so industrious to debauch him, *ver. 17*. His father and grandfather were corrupted by the house of Ahab, from whom no better could be expected. But that the princes of Judah should be seducers to their king, was very sad. But they that incline to the *counsels of the ungodly*, will never want ungodly counsellors. They *made obedience to the king*, flattered him into an opinion of his absolute power, promised to stand by him in making his royal will and pleasure puls for a law, any divine precept or institution to the contrary in any wise notwithstanding. And he hearkened to them: their talk pleased him, and was more agreeable than Jehoiada's dictates used to be. Princes, and lesser people, have been many a time thus flattered into their ruin by those that have promised them liberty and dignity; but have really brought them into the greatest servitude and disgrace.

2. The apostacy itself, *ver. 18*. They left the house of God, and served groves and idols. The princes, it is likely, had a request to the king, which they tell him they durst not offer while Jehoiada lived; but now they hope it will give no offence; it is, that they may set up the groves and idols again, which were thrown down in the beginning of his reign, for they hate to be always confined to the dull old fashioned service of the temple. And he not only gave them leave to do it themselves, but he joined with them. The king and princes, that a while ago were repairing the temple, now forsook the temple; that had pulled down groves and idols, now themselves served them. So inconstant a thing is man, and so little confidence to be put in him!

3. The aggravations of this apostacy, and the additions of guilt to it. God sent prophets to them, *ver. 19*. to reprove them for their wickedness, and to tell them what would be in the end thereof, and so to bring them again unto the Lord; that is ministers work, to bring people, not to themselves, but to God; to bring those again to him that have gone a whoring from him; in the most degenerate times God left not himself without witnesses; though they had dealt very diligenously with God, yet he sent prophets to them to convince and instruct them, and to assure them that they should find favour with him if yet they would return; for he would rather sinners should turn and live than go on and die; and they that perish shall be left inexcusable. The prophets did their part, they testified against them, but few or none received their testimony.

(1.) They slighted all the prophets, they would not give ear; were so strangely wedded to their idols that no reproofs, warnings, threatenings, or any of the various methods which the prophets took to convince them, would reclaim them. Few would hear them, fewer would heed them, but fewest of all believe them, or be governed by them.

(2.) They slew one of the most eminent; *Zecharias the son of Jehoiada*, and perhaps others. Concerning him observe, (1.) The message which he delivered to them in the name of God, *ver. 20*. The people were assembled in the court of the temple, (for they had not quite left it) it is likely on occasion of some solemn feast, when this Zecharias being filled with the spirit of prophecy, and known (it is likely) to be a prophet, stood up in some of the desks that were in the court of the priests, and very plainly, but without any provoking language, told the people of their sin, and what would be the consequences of it. He doth not impeach any particular persons, nor predict any particular judgments, as sometimes the prophets did, but as inoffensively as possible minded them of what was written in the law. Let them but look into their Bibles, and there they would find, (1.) The precept they broke, *ye transgress the commandments of the Lord*, you know you do so in serving groves and idols, and why will you so offend God and wrong yourselves? (2.) The penalty they incurred; you know, if the word of God be true, you cannot prosper in this evil way; never expect to do ill and fare well. Nay, you find already that *because you have forsaken the Lord, he hath forsaken you*, as he told you he would, *Deut. xxix. 25—xxxi. 16, 17*. This is the work of ministers by the word of God as a lamp and a light to discover the sins of men and expound the providences of God.

(3.) The barbarous treatment they gave him for his kindness and faithfulness in delivering this message to them, *ver. 21*. By the conspiracy of the princes, or some of their party, and by the commandment of the king, who thought himself affronted by this fair warning, they stoned him to death immediately, not under colour of law, accusing him as a blasphemer, a traitor, or a false prophet, but in a popular tumult, in the court of the house of the Lord; as horrid a piece of wickedness as perhaps any we read of in all the history of the kings. The person was sacred, a priest; the place sacred, the court of the temple, the inner court, between the porch and the altar; the message yet more sacred, we have reason to think that they knew it came from the spirit of prophecy; the reproof was just, the warning fair, both backed with scripture, and the delivery very gentle, and tender; and yet so impudently and daringly do they defy God himself, that nothing less than the blood of the prophet can satisfy their indignation at the prophecy. *Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and tremble, O earth*, that ever such a villainy should be committed by men, by Israelites, in contempt and violation of every thing that is just, honourable, and sacred! That a king, a king in covenant with God, should command the murder of one whom it was his office to protect and countenance! The Jews say, there were seven transgressions in this; for they killed a priest, a prophet, a judge, they shed innocent blood, polluted the court of the temple, the sabbath, and the day of expiation; for on that day their tradition saith this happened.

(4.) The aggravation of this sin: That this Zecharias, who suffered martyrdom for his faithfulness to God and his country, was the son of Jehoiada, who had done so much good in Israel, and particularly had been as a father to Josiah, *ver. 22*. The affront done by it to God, and contempt put on religion, is not so particularly taken notice of, as the ingratitude there was in it to the memory of Jehoiada. He remembered not the kindness of the father, but slew the son for doing his duty, and what the father would have done, if he had been there. Call a man ungrateful, and you can call him no worse.

(5.) The dying martyr's prophetic imprecation of vengeance upon his murderers; *The Lord look upon it and require it!* This came not from a spirit of revenge, but a spirit of prophecy, *he will require it*. This would be the continual cry of the blood they shed, as Abel's blood cried against Cain; let the God to whom vengeance belongs demand blood for blood. He will do it, for he is righteous. This precious blood was reckoned for presently in

the judgments that came upon this apostate prince; it came into the account afterwards in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans: their misusing the prophets was that which brought upon them ruin without remedy, *chap. xxxvi. 16*. may our Saviour makes the persecutors of him and his gospel answerable for the blood of this Zecharias; so loud, so long doth the blood of the martyrs cry, see *Matt. xxiii. 35*. such as this is the cry of the souls under the altar, *Rev. vi. 10*. How long are thou avenged our blood? for it shall not always go unrevenge.

Lastly, The judgments of God which came upon Josiah for this aggravated wickedness of his.

1. A small army of Syrians made themselves masters of Jerusalem, destroyed the princes, plundered the city, and sent the spoil of it to Damascus, *ver. 23, 24*. God's people while they kept in with God had often been conquerors, when the enemy had the advantage of the greater number; but now on the contrary, an inconsiderable handful of Syrians routed a very great host of Israelites, *because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers*; and then they were not only put upon the level with their enemies, but stood upon the utmost disadvantage, for their God not only departed from them, but turned to be their enemy and fought against them. The Syrians were employed as instruments in God's hand to execute judgment against Josiah; though they little thought so, *Isa. x. 6, 7*. and see *Deut. xxxii. 30*.

2. God smote him with great diseases of body, or mind, or both; either like his grandfather, *chap. xxi. 18*. or like Saul, an evil spirit from God troubling him. While he was plagued with the Syrians, he thought if he could but get clear of them he should do well enough: But before they departed from him, God smote him with diseases. If vengeance pursue men, the end of one trouble will but be the beginning of another.

3. His own servants conspired against him. Perhaps he began to hope his disease would be cured, he was but a middle-aged man, and might recover it; but he that cometh up out of the pit, shall fall into the snare; when he thought he should escape death by sickness, he met it by the sword, they flew him in his bed, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada; by which it should seem that he did not only slay Zecharias, but others of the sons of Jehoiada for his sake. Perhaps they that flew him intended to take vengeance for that blood, however that was it which God intended in permitting them to do it. Those that drink the blood of the saints shall have their own blood given them to drink, for they are worthy. The regicides are here named, *ver. 26*. and it is observable that the mothers of them both were foreigners, one an Ammonitess, and the other a Moabitess. The idolatrous kings, it is likely, countenanced those marriages which the law prohibited for the prevention of idolatry, and see how the products of them turned upon themselves.

4. His people would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, because he had stained his honour by his mal-administration. *Let him not be written with the righteous*, *Psal. lxxix. 28*. These judgments are called the burdens laid upon him, *ver. 27*. for the wrath of God is a heavy burden, too heavy for any man to bear. Or it may be meant of the threatenings denounced against him by the prophets, for those are called burdens; usually God sets some special marks of his displeasure upon apostates in this life for warning to all to remember Lot's wife.

C H A P. XXV.

Amaziah's reign is recorded in this chapter: none of the worst; and yet far from good. Most of the passages in this chapter we had before more briefly related, 2 Kings xiv. Here we find Amaziah, (1.) A just revenger of his father's death, *ver. 1—4*. (2.) An obedient observer of the command of God, *ver. 5—10*. (3.) A cruel conqueror of the Edomites, *ver. 11, 12, 13*. (4.) A foolish worshipper of the gods of Edom, and impatient of reproof for it, *ver. 14, 15, 16*. (5.) Rashly challenging the king of Israel, and smarting for his rashness, *ver. 17—24*. And lastly, Ending his days ingloriously, *ver. 25—28*.

1. AMAZIAH was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart. 3. ¶ Now it came to pass, when the kingdom was established to him, that he slew his servants that had killed the king his father. 4. But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin. 5. ¶ Moreover, Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin: and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war; that could handle spear and shield. 6. He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel, for an hundred talents of silver. 7. But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee: for the LORD is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. 8. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy; for God hath power to help, and to cast down. 9. And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this. 10. Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again, wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger. 11. ¶ And Amaziah strengthened himself; and led forth his people, and

and went to the valley of salt, and smote of the children of Seir ten thousand. 12. And other ten thousand left alive, did the children of Judah carry away captive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces. 13. ¶ But the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil.

Here is, 1. The general character of Amaziah, *He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord*, worshipped the true God, kept the temple-service a going, and countenanced religion in his kingdom; but he did not do it with a perfect heart, ver. 2. that is, he was not a man of serious piety or devotion himself, nor had he any zeal for the exercises of religion. He was no enemy to it, but a cool and indifferent friend: The character of too many in this Laodicean age. They do that which is good, but not with the heart, not with a perfect heart.

2. A necessary piece of justice which he did upon the traitors that murdered his father; he put them to death, ver. 3. Though we should suppose they intended to avenge on their king the death of their prophet, as was intimated, chap. xxiv. 25. yet that would by no means justify their wickedness; for they were not the avengers, but presumptuously took God's work out of his hands. And therefore Amaziah did what became him in calling them to an account for it; but kept within the rule of that law which forbade the putting the children to death for the parents sin, ver. 4.

3. An expedition of his against the Edomites, who some time ago had revolted from under the dominion of Judah, to which he attempted to reduce them. Observe,

1. The great preparations he made for this expedition.

(1.) He mustered his own forces, and marshalled them, ver. 5. and found Judah and Benjamin in all but three hundred thousand men, that were fit for war, whereas in Jehoshaphat's time, fifty or sixty years before, they were four times as many: sin weakens a people, diminishes them, dispirits them, and lessens their number and figure.

(2.) He hired auxiliary troops out of the kingdom of Israel, ver. 6. Finding his own kingdom defective in men, he thought to make it up with his money, and therefore took into his pay one hundred thousand Israelites. If he had advised with any of his prophets before he did this, or had but considered how little any of his ancestors got by their alliances with Israel, he would not have had this to undo again. But rashness makes work for repentance.

2. The command which God sent him by a prophet to dismiss out of his service the force of Israel, ver. 7, 8. He would not have him call in any assistance at all, it looked like distrust of God; if he made sure of his presence, the army he had of his own was sufficient; but particularly, he must not take in their assistance, for the Lord is not with the children of Ephraim, because they are not with him, but worship the calves. This was a good reason why he should not make use of them, because he could not depend upon them to do him any service. What good could be expected from them that had not God with them, nor his blessing upon their undertakings? It is comfortable employing those that we have reason to hope have an interest in heaven; and dangerous associating with those from whom the Lord is departed. The prophet threatened him, that if he persisted in his resolution to take these idolatrous apostate Israelites with him, in hopes thereby to make himself strong for the battle, it was at his peril, they would prove a dead weight to his army, would sink and betray it; *God shall make thee fall before the enemy*, and these Israelites will be the ruin of thy cause; for God has power to help thee without them, and to cast thee down, though thou hast them with thee.

3. The objection which Amaziah made against this command, and the satisfactory answer which the prophet gave to that objection, ver. 9. The king had remitted one hundred talents to the men of Israel for advance-money, Now, saith he, if I send them back, I shall lose that; *but what shall we do for the hundred talents?* This is an objection men often make against their duty, that they are afraid of losing it: Never heed that, saith the prophet, *the Lord is able to give thee much more than this*, and thou mayest depend upon it he will not see thee lose by him. What is one hundred talents between thee and him? He hath ways enow to make up the loss to thee, it is below thee to speak of it. Note, a firm belief of God's all sufficiency to bear us out in our duty, and to make up all the loss and damage we sustain in his service abundantly to our advantage, will make his yoke very easy, and his burden very light. What is it to trust in God, but to be willing to venture the loss of any thing for him, in confidence of the goodness of the security he gives us that we shall not lose by him, but it shall be made up to us in kind or kindness. When we grudge to part with any thing for God and our religion, this should satisfy us, that God is able to give us much more than this. He is just, and he is good, and he is solvent. This king lost one hundred talents by his obedience; and we find just that sum given to his grandson Jotham as a present, chap. xxvii. 5. Then the principal was repaid, and for interest ten thousand measures of wheat, and as many of barley.

4. His obedience to the command of God, which is upon record to his honour. He would rather lose his money, disoblige his allies, and knock off a fourth part of his army just as they were going to take the field, than offend God. *He separated the army of Ephraim, to go home again*, ver. 10. And they went home in great anger, taking it as a mighty affront thus to be made fools of, and to be cashiered as men not fit to be employed, and being perhaps disappointed of the advantage they promised themselves in spoil and plunder, by joining with Judah against Edom. Men are apt to resent that which toucheth them in their profit or reputation, though it frees them from trouble.

5. His triumphs over the Edomites, ver. 11, 12. Ten thousand men he left dead upon the spot in the field of battle; ten thousand more he took prisoners, and barbarously killed them all by throwing them down some steep and craggy precipice. What provocation he had to exercise this cruelty towards them, we are not told; but it was certainly very severe.

6. The mischief which the disbanded soldiers of Israel did to the cities of Judah, either in their return or soon after, ver. 13. They took it so heinously to be sent home, that if they might not go to share with Judah in the spoil of Edom, they would make a prey of Judah. Several cities that lay upon the borders they plundered, and killed three thousand men that made resistance. But why should God suffer this to be done? Was it not in obedience to him that they were sent home, and yet shall the country thus suffer by it? Surely God's way is in the sea! Did not the prophet say, that God was not with the children of Ephraim, and yet they are suffered to prevail against Judah? Doubtless God intended hereby to chastise those cities of Judah for their idolatries, which were found most in those parts

that lay next to Israel. The men of Israel had corrupted them, and now they were made a plague to them: Satan both tempts and torments.

14. ¶ Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites that he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them. 15. Wherefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Amaziah, and he sent unto him a prophet, which said unto him, Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand? 16. And it came to pass as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbare, why shouldst thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel:

Here is, 1. The revolt of Amaziah from the God of Israel to the gods of the Edomites. Egregious folly! Ahaz worshipped the gods of those that had conquered him, he had some little colour for that, chap. xxviii. 23. But to worship the gods of those whom he had conquered, who could not protect their own worshippers, was the greatest nonsense that could be. What did he see in the gods of the children of Seir that could tempt him to set them up for his gods and bow down himself before them? ver. 14. If he had cast the idols down from the rock, and broken them to pieces instead of the prisoners, he had discovered more of the piety, as well as more of the pity of an Israelite: But perhaps for that barbarous inhumanity, he was given up to this ridiculous idolatry.

2. The reproof which God sent to him by a prophet for this sin. The anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and justly; yet before he sent to destroy him, he sent to convince and reclaim him, and so to prevent his destruction: The prophet reasoned with him very fairly, and very mildly, *Why hast thou sought the favour of those gods which could not deliver their own people?* ver. 15. If men would but duly consider the inability of all those things to help them which they have recourse to when they forsake God, they would not be such enemies to themselves.

3. The check he gave to the reprove, ver. 16. He would say nothing in excuse of his own folly: The reproof was too just to be answered, but he fell into a passion with the reprove; (1.) He taunted him as saucy and impertinent, and meddling with that which did not belong to him; *Art thou made of the king's counsel?* Could not a man speak reason to him, but he must be upbraided as usurping the place of a privy-counsellor? But as a prophet, he really was made of the king's counsel by the King of kings, in duty to whom the king was bound not only to hear, but to ask and take his counsel. (2.) He silenced him: bid him forbear, and say not a word more to him. *He said to the seer, See not, Isa. xxx. 10.* Men would gladly have their prophets thus under their girdles, as we say, to speak just when and what they would have them speak, and not otherwise. (3.) He threatened him, *Why shouldst thou be smitten?* It is at thy peril, if thou sayest a word more of this matter. He seems to mind him of Zechariah's fate in the last reign, who was put to death for making bold with the king, and bids him take warning by him. Thus he justifies the killing of that prophet by menacing this, and so in effect makes himself guilty of the blood of both. The prophet which had ordered him to send back the army of Israel, though he contradicted his politics, and lost him a hundred talents, yet he hearkened to and was ruled by, ver. 10. But this prophet, who dissuaded him from worshipping the gods of the Edomites, he ran upon with an unaccountable rage; which must be attributed to the witchcraft of idolatry. He was easily persuaded to part with his talents of silver, but by no means with his gods of silver.

4. The doom which the prophet passed upon him for this. He had more to say to him by way of instruction and advice; but finding him kick thus against the pricks, he forbore. He is joined to idols, let him alone, Hos. iv. 17. Miserable is the condition of that man with whom the blessed Spirit by ministers and conscience forbears to strive, Gen. vi. 3. And both the reprovers in the gate, and that in the bosom, if long brow-beaten and baffled, will at length forbear; so he gave them up to their own hearts lusts. The secure sinner perhaps values himself upon it as a noble and happy achievement to have silenced his reprovers and monitors, and to get clear of them; but what comes of it? *I know that God has determined to destroy thee*; it is a plain indication thou art marked for ruin, *that thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel*. They that are deaf to reproof are ripening apace for destruction, Prov. xxix. 1.

17. ¶ Then Amaziah king of Judah took advice, and sent to Joash the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu king of Israel, saying, Come, let us see one another in the face. 18. And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon, sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. 19. Thou sayest Lo, thou hast smitten the Edomites, and thine heart lifteth thee up to boast: abide now at home, why shouldst thou meddle to thine hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee? 20. But Amaziah would not hear; for it came of God, that he might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they sought after the gods of Edom. 21. So Joash the king of Israel went up and they saw one another in the face, both he and Amaziah king of Judah, at Beth-shean, which belongeth to Judah. 22. ¶ And Judah was put to the worse before Israel, and they fled every man to his tent. 23. And Joash the king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth-shean, and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, from the gate of Ephraim to the corner-gate; four hundred cubits. 24. And he took all the

the gold, and the silver, and all the vessels *that were* found in the house of God with Obed-edom and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria. 25. ¶ And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, lived after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel, fifteen years. 26. Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, first and last, behold, *are* they not written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel? 27. ¶ Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the LORD, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him and slew him there. 28. And they brought him upon horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.

We have here this degenerate prince mortified by his neighbour, and murdered by his own subjects.

1. Never was proud prince more soundly mortified, than Amaziah was by Joash king of Israel. This part of the story was as fully related, 2 Kings xiv. 8, &c. as it is here. The foolish challenge which Amaziah sent to Joash, ver. 17. his haughty scornful answer to it, ver. 18. with the friendly advice he gave him to sit still and know when he was well, ver. 19, his wilful persisting in his challenge, ver. 20, 21. the defeat that was given him, ver. 22. and the calamity he brought upon himself and his city thereby, ver. 23, 24. Now this story verifies two of Solomon's proverbs, (1.) That a man's pride will bring him low; Prov. xxix. 23. it goes before his destruction, not only procures it meritoriously, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased*, but is often the immediate occasion of it. (2.) That he that goes forth hastily to strive, perhaps will not know what to do in the end thereof, when his neighbour has put him to shame, Prov. xxv. 8. He that is fond of contention may have enough of it sooner than he thinks of.

But here are two passages in this story, which we had not before in the Kings. (1.) That Amaziah took advice, before he challenged the king of Israel, ver. 17. But of whom? Not of the prophet, he was *not made of the king's counsel*; but of his statesmen that would flatter him, and bid him go up and prosper. It is good to take advice, but then it must be of those that are fit to advise. Those that will not take advice from the word of God, which will guide them aright, will justly be left to the ill advice of those that will counsel them to their destruction. Let those be made fools that will not be made wise. (2.) Amaziah's imprudence is here made the punishment of his impiety, ver. 20. *It was of the Lord*, he left him to himself to act thus foolishly, that he and his people might be delivered into the hands of their enemies, because they had forsaken God, and fought after the gods of Edom. They that will not be persuaded to do well for their souls, will justly be given up to their own counsels to do ill for themselves even in their outward affairs.

2. Never was poor prince more violently pursued by his own subjects; from the time that he departed from the Lord (so it may be read, ver. 27.) the hearts of his subjects departed from him, and they began to form a design against him in Jerusalem: It is likely they were exasperated against him more for his rash engaging in a war against Israel, than for his worshipping the gods of Edom; But at length the ferment grew so high, and he perceived the plot laid so deep, that he thought fit to quit his royal city and flee to Lachish, either as a private place where he might be hid, or as a strong place where he might be guarded; but they sent after him thither, and slew him there. By this it seems to have been done deliberately, and to have been the act, not of a disgusted servant or two, but of a considerable body that durst avow it. How unrighteous soever they were herein, God was righteous.

C H A P. XXVI.

This chapter gives us an account of the reign of Uzziah (Azariah he was called in the Kings) more fully than we had it before; though it was long, and in some respects illustrious, yet it was very briefly related, 2 Kings xiv. 21.—xv. 1. &c. Here is, (1.) His good character in general, ver. 1—5. (2.) His great prosperity in his wars, his buildings, and all the affairs of his kingdom, ver. 6—15. (3.) His presumption in invading the priest's office, for which he was struck with a leprosy, and confined by it, ver. 16—21. even to his death, ver. 22, 23.

1. **T**HEN all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah. 2. He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers. 3. Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem: his mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. 4. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. 5. And he fought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he fought the LORD, God made him to prosper. 6. And he went forth and warred against the Philistines, and brake down the wall of Gath, and the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod, and built cities about Ashdod, and among the Philistines. 7. And God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians that dwelt in Gur-baal, and the Mehunims. 8. And the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah, and his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt, for he strengthened himself exceedingly. 9. Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner-gate, and at the valley-gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. 10. Also he built towers in the desert; and digged many wells, for he had much cattle, both in the low country, and in the plains: husbandmen also, and vine-dressers in the mountains, and in

Carmel: for he loved husbandry. 11. Moreover, Uzziah had an host of fighting men that went out to war by bands, according to the number of their account, by the hand of Jeiel the scribe, and Maaseiah the ruler, under the hand of Hananiah one of the king's captains. 12. The whole number of the chief of the fathers of the mighty men of valour, were two thousand and six hundred. 13. And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. 14. And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host, shields and spears, and helmets, and harbergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. 15. And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers, and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows, and great stones withal: and his name spread far abroad, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong.

We have here an account of two things concerning Uzziah:

1. His piety. In this he was not very eminent or zealous; yet *he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord*; he kept up the pure worship of the true God, as his father did, and herein better than his father; that we have no reason to think he ever worshipped idols as his father did; no not in his latter days, when his heart was lifted up. It is said, ver. 5. *He fought God in the days of Zechariah*, who, some think, was the son of that Zechariah whom his grandfather Joash slew. He was one that had understanding in the visions of God; either the visions which he himself was favoured with, or the visions of the preceding prophets: He was well versed in prophecy, and conversed much with the upper world, was an intelligent, devout, good man; and, it seems, had a great influence upon Uzziah: Happy are the great men who have such about them, and are willing to be advised by them; but unhappy those, who seek God only while they have such with them, and have not a principle in themselves to bear them out to the end.

2. His prosperity. In general, *as long as he fought the Lord*, and minded religion, *God made him to prosper*. Note, 1. Those only prosper whom God makes to prosper; for prosperity is his gift. 2. Religion and piety is a good friend to outward prosperity. Many have found and owned this, that as long as they fought the Lord, and kept close to their duty, they prospered; but since they forsook God, every thing has gone cross.

Here are divers particular instances of his prosperity.

(1.) His success in his wars; *God helped him*, (ver. 7.) and then he triumphed over the Philistines, those old enemies of God's people, demolished the fortifications of their cities, and put garrisons of his own among them, ver. 6. He obliged the Ammonites to pay him tribute, ver. 8. He made all quiet about him, and kept them in awe.

(2.) The greatness of his fame and reputation. His name was celebrated throughout all the neighbouring countries, ver. 8. and it was a good name, a name for good things with God and good people. This is true fame, and makes a man truly honourable.

3. His buildings: While he acted offensively abroad, he did not neglect the defence of his kingdom at home, but *built towers in Jerusalem*, and fortified them, ver. 4. The wall of Jerusalem was in his father's time much of it broken down, particularly at the corner gate, chap. xxv. 23. probably his father had repaired it, but he to prevent the like mischief for the future fortified it, and *built a tower at the corner-gate*. But his best fortifications of Jerusalem were his close adherence to the worship of God, which if his father had not forsaken, the wall of Jerusalem had not been broken down. While he fortified the city, he did not forget the country, but *built towers in the desert too*, ver. 10. to protect the country people from the inroads of the rapparees, bands of which sometimes alarmed them and plundered them, as chap. xxi. 16.

4. His husbandry. He dealt much in cattle and corn, employed many hands, and got much wealth by it, for he took a pleasure in it, he *loved husbandry*, ver. 10. and it is probable did himself inspect his affairs in the country, which was no disparagement to him, but an advantage, as it encouraged industry among his subjects. It is an honour to the husbandman's calling, that one of the most illustrious princes of the house of David followed it and loved it. He was none of those that delight in war, nor addicted himself to sport and pleasure, but delighted in the innocent and quiet employments of the husbandman.

5. His standing armies. He had, as it should seem, two military establishments. (1.) An *host of fighting men* that were to make excursions abroad, they *went out to war by bands*, ver. 11. Party men, that fetched in spoil from the neighbouring countries by way of reprisal for the depredations they had many a time made upon Judah. (2.) Another army for *guards and garrisons*, that were ready to defend the country in case it should be invaded, ver. 12, 13. so great was their number and valour, that they *made war with mighty power*; no enemy durst face them, or at least could stand before them. Men unarmed can do little in war; Uzziah therefore furnished himself with a great armoury, whence his soldiers were supplied with arms offensive and defensive, ver. 14. spears, bows and slings, shields, helmets and habergeons; swords are not mentioned, because it is probable every man had a sword of his own which he wore constantly. Engines were invented in his time for the annoying besiegers with darts and stones shot from the towers and bulwarks, ver. 15. What pity it is that the wars and fightings which come from men's lusts, have made it necessary for cunning men to employ their skill in inventing instruments of death!

16. ¶ But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD, to burn incense upon the altar of incense, 17. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD that were valiant men: 18. And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, *It appertaineth not unto thee Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests, the sons of Aaron that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary, for thou hast trespassed, neither shall it be for thine honour from the LORD God*. 19. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to

to burn incense, and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense-altar. 20. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence, yea, himself hastened also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. 21. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land. 22. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write. 23. So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.

Here is the only blot we find on the name of king Uzziah; and it is such a one as lies not on any other of the kings. Whoredom, murder, oppression, persecution, and especially idolatry, gave characters to the bad kings, and some of them blemishes to the good ones; David himself not excepted, witness the matter of Uriah. But we find not Uzziah charged with any of these; and yet he transgressed against the Lord his God, and fell under the marks of his displeasure for it; not as other kings in vexatious wars or rebellions, but an incurable disease.

His sin was invading the priest's office. The good way is one, by-paths are many; the transgression of his predecessors was, forsaking the temple of the Lord and flying off from it, chap. xxiv. 18. and burning incense upon idolatrous altars, chap. xxv. 14. His was intruding in the temple of the Lord, further than was allowed him, and attempting himself to burn incense upon the altar of God, for which, it is likely, he pretended an extraordinary zeal and affection. See how hard it is to avoid one extreme, and not run into another.

(1.) That which was at the bottom of his sin, was pride of heart, a lust that ruins more than any other whatsoever. When he was strong, ver. 16. (and marvellously helped by the good providence of God till he was so, ver. 15.) when he was grown very great and considerable in wealth, interest and power, instead of lifting up the name of God in gratitude to him who had done so much for him, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. Thus the prosperity of fools, by puffing them up with pride, destroys them. Now he had done so much business, and won so much honour, he began to think no business, no honour, too great or too good for him; no, not that of the priesthood. Men's pretending to forbidden knowledge, and exercising themselves in things too high for them, is owing to the pride of their heart, and the fleshly mind they are vainly puffed up with.

(2.) His sin was going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense; probably on some solemn feast-day, or when he himself had some special occasion of supplicating the divine favour. What should move him to this piece of presumption, or put it into his head, I cannot conjecture; none of all his predecessors, not the best, not the worst attempted it: the law he knew was express against him, and there was no usage or precedent for him: he could not pretend any necessity, as there was for David's eating the shewbread. (1.) Perhaps he fancied the priests did not do their office so dextrously, decently and devoutly, as they ought, and he could do it better. Or, (2.) He observed that the idolatrous kings did themselves burn incense at the altars of their gods; his father did so, and Jeroboam, 1 Kings xiii. 1. an ambition of which honour was perhaps one thing that tempted them from the house of God, where it was not permitted them; and he being resolved to cleave to God's altar, would try to break through this restraint, and come as near to it as the idolatrous kings did to their altars. But it is called a transgression against the Lord his God. He was not content with the honours God had put upon him, but would usurp those that were forbidden him, like our first parents.

(3.) He was opposed in this attempt by the chief priest and other priests that attended and assisted him, ver. 17, 18. They were ready to burn incense for the king, according to the duty of their place; but if he offer to do it himself, they plainly let him know, he meddles with that which doth not belong to him, and it is at his peril. They did not resist him by laying violent hands on him, though they were valiant men, but by reasoning with him, and shewing him, (1.) That it was not lawful for him to burn incense; *It appertaineth not to thee, O Uzziah, but to the priests*, whose birth-right it is, as sons of Aaron, and who are consecrated to the service. Aaron and his sons were appointed by the law to burn incense, *Exod. xxx. 7.* See *Deut. xxxiii. 10.* 1 Chron. xxiii. 13. David has blessed the people, Solomon and Jehoshaphat had prayed with them and preached to them; Uzziah might have done this, and it would have been to his praise; but for burning incense, that service was to be performed by the priests only. The kingly and priestly office were separated by the law of Moses, not to be united again but in the person of the Messiah. If Uzziah did intend to honour God, and gain acceptance with him in what he did, he was quite out in his aim; for being a service purely of divine institution, he could not expect it should be accepted, unless it were done in the way and by the hands that God had appointed. (2.) That it was not safe. It shall not be for thine honour from the Lord God; more is implied, it will be thy disgrace, and it is at thy peril. The law runs express against all strangers that came nigh, *Numb. iii. 10—xviii. 7.* i. e. all that were not priests. Korah and his accomplices, though Levites, paid dear for offering to burn incense, which was the work of the priests only, *Numb. xvi. 35.* The incense of our prayers must be by faith put into the hands of our Lord Jesus the great high-priest of our profession, else we cannot expect it should be accepted by God. *Rev. viii. 3.*

(4.) He fell into a passion with the priests that reproved him, and would push forward to do what he intended notwithstanding, ver. 9. Uzziah was wroth, and would not part with the censor out of his hand; he took it all to be checked, and would not bear it. *Nititur in vestitum.*

2. His punishment was an incurable leprosy, which rose up in his forehead while he was contending with the priests. If he had submitted to the priests' admonition, acknowledged his error and gone back, all had been well; but when he was wroth with the priests, and fell foul upon them, then God was wroth with him, and smote him with the plague of leprosy. Josephus saith, he threatened the priests with death if they opposed him, and that then the earth shook, the roof of the temple opened, and through the cleft a beam of the sun darted directly upon the king's face, wherein immediately the leprosy appeared. And some conjecture, that that was the

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earthquake in the days of Uzziah, which we read of *Amos i. 1.* and *Zech. xiv. 5.*

Now this sudden stroke,

1. Ended the controversy between him and the priests; for when the leprosy appeared, they were emboldened to thrust him out of the temple; nay, he himself hastened to go out, because the Lord had smitten him with a disease that was in a particular manner a token of his displeasure, and that he knew secluded him from common converse with men; much more from the altar of God. He would not be convinced by what the priests said; but God took an effectual course to convince him. If presumptuous men will not be made to see their error by the judgments of God's mouth, they shall be made to see it by the judgments of his hand. It evidenced some religious fear of God in the heart of this king; even in the midst of transgression, that as soon as he found God was angry with him, he not only let fall his attempt, but retired with the utmost precipitation. Though he strove with the priests, he would not strive with his Maker.

2. It remained a lasting punishment of his transgression; for he continued a leper to the day of his death, shut up in confinement, and shut out from society, and forced to leave it to his son to manage all his business, ver. 21. Thus God gave an instance of his resisting the proud, and of his jealousy for the purity and honour of his own institutions: thus he gave fair warning even to great and good men to keep their distance, and not to intrude in those things which they have not seen. Thus he gave Uzziah a loud and constant call to repentance, and a long space to repent, which we have reason to hope he made a good improvement of. He had been a man of much business in the world, but being taken off from that, and confined to a several house, he had leisure to think of another world, and prepare for it. By this judgment upon the king, God intended to possess the people with a great veneration for the temple, the priesthood, and other sacred things, which they had been apt to think meanly of. While the king was a leper, he was as good as dead, dead while he lived, and buried alive; and so the law was in effect answered, that the stranger which cometh nigh shall be put to death. The disgrace survived him; for when he was dead, they would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, because he was a leper, which stained all his other glory.

3. It was a punishment that answered the sin, as face doth to face in a glass. (1.) Pride was at the bottom of his transgression, and thus God humbled him, and put dishonour upon him. (2.) He invaded the office of the priests in contempt of them, and God struck him with a disease, which in a particular manner made him subject to the inspection and sentence of the priests; for to them pertained the judgment of the leprosy, *Deut. xxiv. 8.* (3.) He thrust himself into the temple of God, whither the priests only had admission, and for that was thrust out of the very courts of the temple, into which the meanest of his subjects that was ceremonially clean had free access. (4.) He confronted the priests that faced him and opposed his presumption, and for that the leprosy rose in his forehead, which in Miriam's case is compared to her father's spitting in her face, *Numb. xii. 14.* (5.) He invaded the dignity of the priesthood which he had no right to, and so is for that deprived even of the royal dignity, which he had a right to. They that covet forbidden honours, forfeit allowed ones. Adam, by catching at the tree of knowledge, which he might not eat of, debarred himself from the tree of life which he might have eaten of. Let all that read it say, the Lord is righteous.

C H A P. XXVII.

Here is a very short account of the reign of Jotham, a pious prosperous prince; whom one would wish to have known more of; but we may better dispense with the brevity of his story, because that which lengthened the history of the three last kings was their degeneracy in the latter end, which we had a faithful account of; but there was no occasion for such a melancholy conclusion of the history of his reign, which is only an account, (1.) Of the date and continuance of his reign, ver. 1—8. (2.) The general good character of it, ver. 1—6. (3.) The prosperity of it, ver. 3, 4, 5. (4.) The period of it, ver. 7—9.

1. JOTHAM was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; his mother's name also was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadok. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Uzziah did: howbeit he entered not into the temple of the LORD. And the people did yet corruptly. 3. He built the high gate of the house of the LORD, and on the wall of Ophel he built much. 4. Moreover, he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers. 5. ¶ He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year, and the third. 6. So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God. 7. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, lo. they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. 8. He was five and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9. ¶ And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

There is not much more related here concerning Jotham, than we had before, 2 Kings xv. 32, 33.

1. That he reigned well: he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD; the course of his reign was good and pleasing to God, whose favour he made his end, and his word his rule; and (which speaks to him to act from a good principle) he prepared his way before the Lord his God, ver. 6. i. e. He walked circumspectly, and with much caution, continued how to him that which was evil, and compassed that which was good: he reigned before him,

him, and cast his affairs into such a posture, and such a method as made the regular management of them the more easy. Or, he established or fixed his ways before the Lord, i. e. he walked steadily and constantly in the way of his duty, was uniform and resolute in it; not like some of those that went before him, who though they had some good in them, lost their credit by their inconstancy and inconsistency with themselves. They had run well, but something hindered them. It was not so with Jotham.

Two things are observed here in his character:

(1.) That what was amiss in his father he amended in himself, *ver. 2.* He did according to all that his father did well and wisely; howbeit, he would not imitate him in what he did amiss; for he entered not into the temple of the Lord to burn incense as his father did; but took warning by his fate not to dare so presumptuous a thing. Note, We must not imitate the best men, and those we have the greatest veneration for, any farther than they did well; but, on the contrary, their falls and harms by them must be warnings to us to walk the more circumspectly, that we stumble not at the same stone that they stumbled at.

(2.) That what was amiss in his people he could not prevail to amend. *The people did yet corruptly.* Perhaps it reflects some blame upon him, that he was wanting in his part toward the reformation of the land. Men may be very good themselves, and yet not have courage and zeal to do what they might do toward the reforming of others. However, it is certain it reflects a great deal of blame upon the people, that they did not do what they might have done to improve the advantages of so good a reign: they had good instructions given them, and a good example set before them, but they would not be reformed; so that even in the reign of their good kings, as well as the bad ones, they were *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*; for they still did corruptly and the foun-der melted in vain.

2. That he prospered, and made a very good figure.

(1.) He built. And in building, he began with the gate of the house of the Lord, repaired, beautified, and raised that; and then fortified the wall of Ophel, and built cities in the mountains of Judah, *ver. 3, 4.* took all possible care for the fortifying of his country, and the replenishing of it.

(2.) He conquered. Prevailed against the Ammonites, who had invaded Judah in Jehoshaphat's time, *chap. xx. 1.* He triumphed over them, and exacted great contributions from them, *ver. 5.*

(3.) He became mighty, *ver. 6.* in wealth and power, and influence upon the neighbour nations, who courted his friendship and feared his displeasure; and this he got by preparing his ways before the Lord his God. The more steadfast we are in religion, the more mighty we are both for the resistance of that which is evil, and for the performance of that which is good.

3. That he finished his course too soon, but finished it with honour: had the unhappiness to die in the midst of his days; but to balance that, the happiness not to out-live his reputation, as his three next predecessors did. He died when he was but forty-one years of age, *ver. 8.* but his wars and his ways, his wars abroad and his ways at home, were so glorious, that they were recorded in the book of the kings of Israel, as well as of the kings of Judah, *ver. 7.* The last words of the chapter carry on the heaviest accent of any in the chapter, that *Ahaz his son reigned in his stead*, whose character in all respects was the reverse of his. When that wealth and power which wife men have done good with, devolves upon fools that will do hurt with it, it is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

C H A P. XXVIII.

This chapter is the history of the reign of Ahaz the son of Jotham; an ill reign. It was, and which helped to augment the fierce anger of the Lord. We have here; (1.) His great wickedness, ver. 1—4. (2.) The trouble he brought himself into by it, ver. 5—8. (3.) The reproof which God sent by a prophet to the army of Israel for trampling upon their brethren of Judah, and the obedient ear they gave to that reproof, ver. 9—15. (4.) The many calamities that followed after to Ahaz and his people, ver. 16—21. (5.) The continuance of his idolatry notwithstanding, ver. 22—25. and so his story ends, ver. 26, 27.

1. **A**HAZ was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father. 2. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. 3. Moreover, he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 4. He sacrificed also, and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. 5. Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria, and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus: and he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.

Sure never man had a greater opportunity of doing well than Ahaz had, finding things in a good posture, the kingdom rich and strong, and religion established, and yet here we have him in these few verses,

1. Wretchedly corrupted and debauched. He had had a good education given him; and a good example set him; but parents cannot give grace to their children; all the instructions he had were lost upon him, *he did not that which is right in the sight of the Lord, ver. 1.* nay, he did a great deal that was wrong, a wrong to God, to his own soul, and to his people; he walked in the way of the revolted Israelites, and the devoted Canaanites, made molten images and worshipped them; contrary to the second commandment; nay he made them for Baalim, contrary to the first commandment. He forsook the temple of the Lord, and sacrificed and burnt incense on the hills; as if he would put him nearer heaven, and under every green tree, as if those would signify the protection and influence of heaven by their shade, and dropping. And to complete his wickedness, as one perfectly devoted to all natural affections, as well as religion, and perfectly devoted to the service and pleasure of the great enemy of mankind, he burnt his children in the fire to Moloch, *ver. 3.* and thinking it enough to dedicate them to that infernal fiend by making them to pass through the fire, he set an absolute law, by the prince of the power of the air, to carry among the children of disobedience.

2. Wretchedly spoiled and made a prey of. When he forsook God, and

at a vast expence put himself under the protection of false gods, God, that of right was his God, delivered him into the hands of his enemies, *ver. 5.* (1.) The Syrians insulted him, and triumphed over him, beat him in the field, and carried away a great many of his people into captivity. (2.) The king of Israel, though an idolater too, was made a scourge to him, and smote him with a great slaughter. The people suffered by these judgments, their blood was shed, their country wasted, their families ruined; for when they had a good king, though they did corruptly, *chap. xxxvii. 2.* yet then his goodness sheltered them; but now they had a bad one all their defence was departed from them, and an inundation of judgments broke in upon them. They that knew not their happiness in the foregoing reign, were taught to value it by the miseries of this.

6. ¶ For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. 7. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah, that was next to the king. 8. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren, two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. 9. But a prophet of the LORD was there; whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. 10. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bond-men, and bond-women unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? 11. Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you. 12. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war; 13. And said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sin and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. 14. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil, before the princes and all the congregation. 15. And the men which were expressed by name, rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

We have here;

1. Treacherous Judah under the rebukes of God's providence, and they are very severe. Never was such bloody work made among them since they were a kingdom, and by Israelites too. Ahaz walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and the king of Israel was the instrument God made use of for his punishment. Those whom we make our patterns, or make ourselves partners with in sin, it is just with God to make them a plague to us. A war broke out between Judah and Israel, in which Judah went by the worst. For, (1.) There was a great slaughter of men in the field of battle: vast numbers; one hundred and twenty thousand men, and valiant men too at other times, were slain, *ver. 6.* and some of the first rank: the king's son for one. He had sacrificed some of his sons to Moloch, justly therefore is this sacrificed to the divine vengeance. Here is another that was next to the king, his friend, the prime minister of state, or perhaps next him in the battle, so that the king himself had a fair escape, *ver. 7.* The kingdom of Israel was not strong at this time, and yet strong enough to bring this great destruction upon Judah. But certainly so many men, great men, stout men could not have been cut off in one day, if they had not been strangely dispirited, both by the consciousness of their own guilt, and by the righteous hand of God upon them. Even valiant men are numbered, as sheep for the slaughter, and become an easy prey to the enemy, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers, and he had therefore forsaken them. (2.) There was a great captivity of women and children, *ver. 8.* when the army in the field was routed, the cities and towns, and country villages were all easily stripped, the inhabitants taken for slaves, and their wealth for a prey.

2. Even the victorious Israel, under the rebukes of God's word, for the ill principle they had gone upon in making war with Judah, and the ill use they made of their success, and the good effect of this rebuke. Here is;

1. The message which God sent them by a prophet, who went out to meet them, not to applaud their valour, or congratulate their victory, though they returned laden with spoils and triumphs, but in God's name to tell them of their faults, and warn them by the judgments of God.

(1.) He tells them how they came by this victory they were so proud of; it was not because God favoured them, or that they had merited it at his hand, but because he was wroth with Judah, and made them the rod of his indignation. Not for your righteousness, be it known to you, but for their wickedness, *Deut. ix. 5.* they are broken off, therefore be ye not high-minded but fear, lest God do so unto you, *Röm. xi. 20, 21.*

(2.) He charges them with the abuse of the power God had given them over their brethren. They understand not what victory is, who think it gives them authority to do what they will, and that the longest sword is the greatest right to lives and estates (*Jusque datum sedit*); no, it is impolitic not to use victory. So it is impious to abuse it. The conquerors are here employed, (1.) For the cruelty of the slaughter they had made in the field. They had indeed shed the blood of war in war, we suppose that lawful, but it

turned

turned into sin to them, because they did it from an ill principle of enmity to their brethren, and after an ill manner, with a barbarous fury, *a rage reaching up to heaven*, i.e. that cries to God for vengeance against such bloody men, that delighted in military execution. They that serve God's justice if they do it with rage and a spirit of revenge, make themselves obnoxious to it and forfeit the honour of acting for him. *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (2.) For the imperious treatment they gave their prisoners. *Yenow purpose to keep them under*, to use them or sell them as slaves though they are your brethren and free-born Israelites. God takes notice of what men purpose as well as of what they say and do.

(3.) He minds them of their own sins, by which they also were obnoxious to the wrath of God. *Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?* He appeals to their own consciences, and to the notorious evidence of the thing. Though you are now made the instruments of correcting Judah for sin, yet do not think you are therefore innocent yourselves; no, you are also guilty before God. This is intended as a check, (1.) To their triumph in their success; you are sinners, and it ill becomes sinners to be proud; you have carried the day now, but be not secure, the wheel may ere long return upon yourselves, for if judgment begin thus with those that have the cause of God among them, what shall be the end of such as worship the calves? (2.) To their severity towards their brethren; you have now got them under, but you ought to show mercy to them, for you yourselves are undone if you do not find mercy with God. It ill becomes sinners to be cruel. You have transgressed enow to answer for already, and need not add this to the rest.

(4.) He commands them to release the prisoners, and to send them home again carefully, *ver. 11.* for you having sinned, *the fierce wrath of God is upon you*, and there is no other way of escaping it but by showing mercy.

2. The resolution of the princes thereupon not to detain the prisoners: *They stood up against them that came from the war*, though flushed with victory and told them plainly, they should not bring their captives into Samaria, *ver. 12, 13.* They had sin enough already to answer for, and would have nothing done to add to their trespass. In this they discovered an obedient regard to the word of God by his prophet, and a tender compassion toward their brethren, which was wrought in them by the tender mercy of God; for he regarded the affliction of this poor people, and heard their cry, and *made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captive.* Psal. cvi. 44—46.

3. The compliance of the soldiers with the resolution of the princes in this matter, and the dismissal of the captives thereupon. (1.) The armed men, though being armed they might by force have maintained their title to what they got by the sword, acquiesced and left their captives and the spoil to the disposal of the princes, *ver. 14.* and herein they shewed a more true heroic bravery than they did in taking them. It is a great honour for any man to yield to the authority of reason and religion against his interest. (2.) The princes very generally sent home the poor captives well accommodated, *ver. 15.* Those that hope to find mercy with God, must learn from hence with what tenderness to carry themselves towards those that lie at their mercy. It is strange that these princes, who in this distance discovered such a deference to the word of God, and such an influence upon the people, had not so much grace, as in obedience to the calls of God by so many prophets, to root idolatry out of their kingdom, which soon after this was the ruin of it.

16. ¶ At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. 17. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. 18. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-sheMesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shochoh, with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Ginnizo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there. 19. For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed fore against the LORD. 20. And Tilgath-pileser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, and strengthened him not. 21. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD: and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not. 22. ¶ And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. 23. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me: but they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made them altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers. 26. ¶ Now the rest of his acts, and of all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is, 1. The great distress which the kingdom of Ahaz was reduced to for his sin. In general, (1.) *The Lord brought Judah low*, *ver. 19.* They had lately been very high in wealth and power; but God found means to take them down, and make them as despicable as they had been formidable. They that will not humble themselves unto the word of God, will justly be humbled by his judgments. *Iniquity brings men low*, Psal. cvi. 43. (2.) Ahaz made Judah naked. As his sin debased them, so it exposed them. It made them naked to their shame; for it exposed them to contempt, as a man unclothed: it made them naked to their danger; for it exposed them to assaults as a man unarmed. *Ezek. xxxiii. 25.* sin strips men. In particular, the Edomites to be revenged for Amaziah's cruel usage

of them, *chap. xxv. 12.* smote Judah, and carried off many captives, *ver. 17.* The Philistines also insulted them, took and kept possession of several cities and villages that lay towards them, *ver. 18.* and so they were revenged for the incursions which Uzziah had made upon them, *chap. xxxvi. 6.* And to shew that it was purely the sin of Ahaz that brought the Philistines upon his country, in the very year that he died the prophet Isaiah foretold the destruction of the Philistines by his son, *Isai. xiv. 28, 29.*

2. The addition which Ahaz made both to the national distress and the national guilt.

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C H A P. XXIX.

We are here entering upon a pleasant scene, the good and glorious reign of Hezekiah; in which we shall find more of God and religion, than perhaps in any of the good reigns we have yet met with; for he was a very zealous, devout, good man, none like him. In this chapter we have an account of the work of reformation which he set about with vigour, immediately after his accession to the crown. Here is, (1.) His exhortation to the priests and Levites, when he put them in possession of the house of God again, *ver. 1—11.* (2.) The care and pains which the Levites took to cleanse the temple, and put things in order there, *ver. 12—19.* (3.) A solemn revival of God's ordinances that had been neglected, in which atonement was made for the sins of the last reign, and the wheels set a-going again, to the great satisfaction of king and people, *ver. 20—30.*

HEZEKIAH began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. 3. ¶ He in the first year of his reign, in the first month opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. 4. And he brought in the priests, and the Levites, and gathered them together in the east-street. 5. And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. 6. For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs. 7. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch.

him, and cast his affairs into such a posture, and such a method as made the regular management of them the more easy. Or, he established or fixed his ways before the Lord, i.e. he walked steadily and constantly in the way of his duty, was uniform and resolute in it; not like some of those that went before him, who though they had some good in them, lost their credit by their inconstancy and inconsistency with themselves. They had run well, but something hindered them. It was not so with Jotham.

Two things are observed here in his character:

(1.) That what was amiss in his father he amended in himself, *ver. 2.* He did according to all that his father did well and wisely; howbeit, he would not imitate him in what he did amiss; for he entered not into the temple of the Lord to burn incense as his father did; but took warning by his fate not to dare so presumptuous a thing. Note, We must not imitate the best men, and those we have the greatest veneration for, any farther than they did well; but, on the contrary, their falls and harms by them must be warnings to us to walk the more circumspectly, that we stumble not at the same stone that they stumbled at.

(2.) That what was amiss in his people he could not prevail to amend. *The people did yet corruptly.* Perhaps it reflects some blame upon him, that he was wanting in his part toward the reformation of the land. Men may be very good themselves, and yet not have courage and zeal to do what they might do toward the reforming of others. However, it is certain it reflects a great deal of blame upon the people, that they did not do what they might have done to improve the advantages of so good a reign: they had good instructions given them, and a good example set before them, but they would not be reformed; so that even in the reign of their good kings, as well as the bad ones, they were *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*; for they still did corruptly and the fount-der melted in vain.

2. That he prospered, and made a very good figure.

(1.) He built. And in building, he began with *the gate of the house of the Lord*, repaired, beautified, and raised that; and then *fortified the wall of Ophel, and built cities in the mountains of Judah*, *ver. 3, 4.* took all possible care for the fortifying of his country, and the replenishing of it.

(2.) He conquered. Prevailed against the Ammonites, who had invaded Judah in Jehoahaphat's time, *chap. xx. 1.* He triumphed over them, and exacted great contributions from them, *ver. 5.*

(3.) He became mighty, *ver. 6.* in wealth and power, and influence upon the neighbour nations, who courted his friendship and feared his displeasure; and this he got by *preparing his ways before the Lord his God.* The more steadfast we are in religion, the more mighty we are both for the resistance of that which is evil, and for the performance of that which is good.

3. That he finished his course too soon, but finished it with honour: had the unhappiness to die in the midst of his days; but to balance that, the happiness to out-live his reputation, as his three next predecessors did. He died when he was but forty-one years of age, *ver. 8.* but his wars and his ways, his wars abroad and his ways at home, were so glorious, that they were recorded in the book of the kings of Israel, as well as of the kings of Judah, *ver. 7.* The last words of the chapter carry on the heavenly accent of any in the chapter, that *Ahaz his son reigned in his stead*, whose character in all respects was the reverse of his. When that wealth and power which wise men have done good with, devolves upon fools that will do hurt with it, it is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

C H A P. XXVIII.

This chapter is the history of the reign of Ahaz the son of Jotham; an ill reign it was, and which helped to augment the fierce anger of the Lord. We have here, (1.) His great wickedness, ver. 1—4. (2.) The trouble he brought himself into by it, ver. 5—8. (3.) The reproof which God sent by a prophet to the army of Israel for trampling upon their brethren of Judah, and the obedience ear they gave to that reproof, ver. 9—15. (4.) The many calamities that followed after to Ahaz and his people, ver. 16—21. (5.) The continuance of his idolatry notwithstanding, ver. 22—25. and so his story ends, ver. 26, 27.

1. **A**H AZ was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not *that which was right* in the sight of the LORD, like David his father. 2. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. 3. Moreover, he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 4. He sacrificed also, and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree. 5. Wherefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria, and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus: and he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter.

Sure never man had a greater opportunity of doing well than Ahaz had, finding things in a good posture, the kingdom rich and strong, and religion established, and yet here we have him in these few verses,

1. Wretchedly corrupted and debauched. He had had a good education, given him, and a good example set him; but parents cannot give grace to their children; all the instructions he had were lost upon him, *he did not that which is right in the sight of the Lord*, *ver. 1.* nay he did a great deal that was wrong, a wrong to God, to his own soul, and to his people; he walked in the way of the revolted Israelites, and the devoted Canaanites, made molten images and worshipped them, contrary to the second commandment; may he made them for Baalim, contrary to the first commandment. He forsook the temple of the Lord, and sacrificed and burnt incense on the hills, as if he would help him nearer heaven; and under every green tree, as if those would signify the protection and influence of heaven by their shade and dropping. And to complete his wickedness, as one perfectly devoted to all ungodly ways, as well as religion, and perfectly devoted to the service and interest of the great enemy of mankind, he burnt his children in the fire to Moloch, *ver. 3.* not thinking it enough to dedicate them to that infernal fiend by carrying them to pass through the fire, but what an absolute way the prince of the power of the air bears among the children of disobedience.

2. Wretchedly spoiled and made a prey of. When he forsook God, and

at a vast expence put himself under the protection of false gods, God, that of right was his God, delivered him into the hands of his enemies, *ver. 5.* (1.) The Syrians insulted him, and triumphed over him, beat him in the field, and carried away a great many of his people into captivity. (2.) The king of Israel, though an idolater too, was made a scourge to him, and smote him with a great slaughter. The people suffered by these judgments, their blood was shed, their country wasted, their families ruined; for when they had a good king, though they did corruptly, *chap. xxxvii. 2.* yet then his goodness sheltered them; but now they had a bad one all their defence was departed from them, and an inundation of judgments broke in upon them. They that knew not their happiness in the foregoing reign, were taught to value it by the miseries of this.

6. ¶ For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. 7. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah, that was next to the king. 8. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren, two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. 9. But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out before the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, Behold because the LORD God of your fathers was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage that reacheth up unto heaven. 10. And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bond-men, and bond-women unto you: but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? 11. Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which ye have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you. 12. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war; 13. And said unto them, Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for whereas we have offended against the LORD already, ye intend to add more to our sin and to our trespass: for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. 14. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil, before the princes and all the congregation. 15. And the men which were expressed by name, rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

We have here,

1. Treacherous Judah under the rebukes of God's providence, and they are very severe. Never was such bloody work made among them since they were a kingdom, and by Israelites too. Ahaz walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and the king of Israel was the instrument God made use of for his punishment. Those whom we make our patterns, or make ourselves partners with in sin, it is just with God to make them a plague to us. A war broke out between Judah and Israel, in which Judah went by the worst. For, (1.) There was a great slaughter of men in the field of battle, vast numbers; one hundred and twenty thousand men, and valiant men too at other times, were slain, *ver. 6.* and some of the first rank: the king's son for one. He had sacrificed some of his sons to Moloch, justly therefore is this sacrificed to the divine vengeance. Here is another that was next the king, his friend, the prime minister of state, or perhaps next him in the battle, so that the king himself had a fair escape, *ver. 7.* The kingdom of Israel was not strong at this time, and yet strong enough to bring this great destruction upon Judah. But certainly so many men, great men, stout men could not have been cut off in one day, if they had not been strangely dispirited, both by the consciousness of their own guilt, and by the righteous hand of God upon them. Even valiant men are numbered, as sheep for the slaughter, and became an easy prey to the enemy, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers, and he had therefore forsaken them. (2.) There was a great captivity of women and children, *ver. 8.* when the army in the field was routed, the cities and towns, and country villages were all easily stripped, the inhabitants taken for slaves, and their wealth for a prey.

2. Even the victorious Israel, under the rebukes of God's word, for the ill principle they had gone upon in making war with Judah, and the ill use they made of their success; and the good effect of this rebuke. Here is,

1. The message which God sent them by a prophet, who went out to meet them, not to applaud their valour, or congratulate their victory, though they returned laden with spoils and triumphs, but in God's name to tell them of their faults, and warn them by the judgments of God.

(1.) He tells them how they came by this victory they were so proud of; it was not because God favoured them, or that they had merited it at his hand, but because he was wroth with Judah, and made them the rod of his indignation. *Not for your righteousness*, be it known to you, but for their wickedness, *Deut. ix. 5.* they are broken off; therefore be ye not high-minded but fear, lest God do so surely not you, *Rom. xi. 20, 21.*

(2.) He chargeth them with the abuse of the power God had given them over their brethren. They understand not what victory is, who think it gives them authority to do what they will, and that the longest sword is the clearest right to lives and estates (*Jusque datum sceleris*); no, as it is impolitic not to use victory, so it is impious to abuse it. The conquerors are here reproved, (1.) For the cruelty of the slaughter they had made in the field. They had indeed shed the blood of war in war, wd suppose that lawful, but it

turned

turned into sin to them, because they did it from an ill principle of enmity to their brethren, and after an ill manner, with a barbarous fury, a rage reaching up to heaven, i.e. that cries to God for vengeance against such bloody men, that delighted in military execution. They that love God's justice if they do it with rage and a spirit of revenge, make themselves obnoxious to it and forfeit the honour of acting for him. *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (2.) For the imperious treatment they gave their prisoners. *Ye now purpose to keep them under, to use them or sell them as slaves though they are your brethren and free-born Israelites.* God takes notice of what men purpose as well as of what they say and do.

(3.) He minds them of their own sins, by which they also were obnoxious to the wrath of God. *Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?* He appeals to their own consciences, and to the notorious evidence of the thing. Though you are now made the instruments of correcting Judah for sin, yet do not think you are therefore innocent yourselves; no, you are also guilty before God. This is intended as a check, (1.) To their triumph in their success; you are sinners, and it ill becomes sinners to be proud; you have carried the day now, but be not secure, the wheel may ere long return upon yourselves, for if judgment begin thus with those that have the cause of God among them, what shall be the end of such as worship the calves? (2.) To their severity towards their brethren; you have now got them under, but you ought to shew mercy to them, for you yourselves are undone if you do not find mercy with God. It ill becomes sinners to be cruel. You have transgressed enough to answer for already, and need not add this to the rest.

(4.) He commands them to release the prisoners, and to send them home again carefully, *ver. 11.* for you having sinned, *the fierce wrath of God is upon you,* and there is no other way of escaping it but by shewing mercy.

2. The resolution of the princes thereupon not to detain the prisoners: *They stood up against them that came from the war,* though flushed with victory and told them plainly, they should not bring their captives into Samaria, *ver. 12, 13.* They had sin enough already to answer for, and would have nothing done to add to their trespass. In this they discovered an obedient regard to the word of God by his prophet, and a tender compassion toward their brethren, which was wrought in them by the tender mercy of God; for he regarded the affliction of this poor people, and heard their cry, and made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captive. *Psalm. cvi. 44—46.*

3. The compliance of the soldiers with the resolution of the princes in this matter, and the dismissal of the captives thereupon. (1.) The armed men, though being armed they might by force have maintained their title to what they got by the sword, acquiesced and left their captives and the spoil to the disposal of the princes, *ver. 14.* and herein they shewed a more true heroic bravery than they did in taking them. It is a great honour for any man to yield to the authority of reason and religion against his interest. (2.) The princes very generally sent home the poor captives well accommodated, *ver. 15.* Those that hope to find mercy with God, must learn from hence with what tenderness to carry themselves towards those that lie at their mercy. It is strange that these princes, who in this distance discovered such a deference to the word of God, and such an influence upon the people, had not so much grace, as in obedience to the calls of God by so many prophets, to root idolatry out of their kingdom, which soon after this was the ruin of it.

16. ¶ At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. 17. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. 18. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho, with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof; and they dwelt there. 19. For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed fore against the LORD. 20. And Tilgath-pileser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, and strengthened him not. 21. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the LORD: and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not. 22. ¶ And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. 23. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me: but they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made them altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers. 26. ¶ Now the rest of his acts, and of all his ways, first and last, behold; they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem: but they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

Here is, 1. The great distress which the kingdom of Ahaz was reduced to for his sin. In general, (1.) *The Lord brought Judah low,* *ver. 19.* They had lately been very high in wealth and power; but God found means to take them down, and make them as despicable as they had been formidable. They that will not humble themselves unto the word of God, will justly be humbled by his judgments. *Iniquity brings men low,* *Psalm. cvi. 41.* (2.) Ahaz made Judah naked. As his sin debased them, so it exposed them. It made them naked to their shame, for it exposed them to contempt, as a man unclothed: It made them naked to their danger, for it exposed them to assaults as a man unarmed. *Exod. xxxii. 25.* sin strips men. In particular, the Edomites to be revenged for Amaziah's cruel usage

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We are here entering upon a pleasant scene, the good and glorious reign of Hezekiah: in which we shall find more of God and religion, than perhaps in any of the good reigns we have yet met with; for he was a very zealous, devout, good man, none like him. In this chapter we have an account of the work of reformation which he set about with vigour, immediately after his accession to the crown. Here is, (1.) His exhortation to the priests and Levites, when he put them in possession of the house of God again, *ver. 1—11.* (2.) The care and pains which the Levites took to cleanse the temple, and put things in order there, *ver. 12—19.* (3.) A solemn revival of God's ordinances that had been neglected, in which atonement was made for the sins of the last reign, and the wheels set a-going again, to the great satisfaction of king and people, *ver. 20—36.*

H Ezekiah began to reign when he was five and twenty years old, and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. 3. ¶ He in the first year of his reign, in the first month opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. 4. And he brought in the priests, and the Levites, and gathered them together in the east street. 5. And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. 6. For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs. 7. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch.

porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burnt incense, nor offered burnt-offerings in the holy place, unto the God of Israel. 8. Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes. 9. For lo, our father's have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives, are in captivity for this. 10. Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. 11. My sons, be not now negligent; for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that you should minister unto him, and burn incense.

Here is, 1. Hezekiah's age when he came to the crown, he was *twenty-five years old*. Joash that came to the crown after two bad reigns, was but eight; which occasioned the delay of the reformation: But Hezekiah was come to years, and so applied himself presently to it. We may well think with what a sorrowful heart he beheld his father's idolatry and profaneness, how it troubled him to see the doors of the temple shut up, and whilst his father lived, he durst not open them: His soul no doubt wept in secret for it, and he vowed, that when he should receive the congregation, he would redress these grievances, which made him to do it with more readiness and resolution.

2. His general character. *He did that which was right like David*, ver. 2. Of several of his predecessors it had been said they did that which was right, *but not like David*, not with David's integrity and zeal. But here was one that had as hearty an affection for the ark and law of God as ever David had.

3. His speedy application to the great work of restoring religion. The first thing he did, was to *open the doors of the house of the Lord*, ver. 3. We are willing to hope his father had not quite suppressed the temple-service; for then the holy fire on the altar must have gone out, which we do not read of the re-kindling of, but he had hindered the people from attending it, and the priests, but such of them as were of his own party, 2 Kings xvi. 15. But Hezekiah immediately threw the church doors open, and *brought in the priests and Levites*. He found Judah low and naked, yet did not make it his first business to revive the civil interests of his kingdom, but to restore religion to its good posture again. Those that begin with God, begin at the right end of their work, and it will prosper accordingly.

4. His speech to the priests and Levites; It was well known no doubt that he had a real kindness for religion, and was disaffected to the corruptions of the last reign; yet we do not find the priests and Levites addressing themselves to him for the restoration of the temple-service, but he calls upon them; which I doubt speaks their coldness as much as his zeal; and perhaps if they had done their part with vigour, things had not been brought into so very bad a posture as Hezekiah found them in. Hezekiah's exhortation to the Levites is very pathetic.

1. He lays before them the desolations of religion, and the deplorable state to which it was brought among them, ver. 6. 7. *Our fathers have trespassed*. He saith not, my father, because it became him, as a son, to be as tender as might be of his father's name, and because his father would not have done all this, if their father's had not neglected their duty. Urijah the priest had joined with Ahaz in setting up an idolatrous altar. He complains, (1.) That the house of God had been deserted; *They have forsaken God and turned their backs upon his habitation*. Note, Those that turn their backs upon God's ordinance, may truly be said to forsake God himself. (2.) That the instituted worship of God there had been let fall; the lamps were not lighted, incense was not burnt; the like neglects are now, and no less culpable, if the word be not duly read and opened, for that was signified by the *lighting of the lamps*, and if prayers and praises be not duly offered up, for that was signified by the *burning of incense*.

2. He shews them the sad consequences of the neglect and decay of religion among them, ver. 8, 9. This was the cause of all the calamities they had lain under; God had in anger delivered them to trouble, to the sword, and to captivity. When we are under the rebukes of God's providence, it is good for us to enquire whether we have not neglected God's ordinances and whether that be not the controversy he has with us.

3. He declares his own full purpose and resolution to revive religion, and make it his business to promote it, ver. 10. *It is in my heart, i. e.* I am fully resolved to *make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, i. e.* to worship him only, and in that way which he hath appointed, for I am sure that otherwise his fierce anger will not turn away from us. This covenant he would not only make himself, but bring his people into the bond of.

4. He engageth and exciteth the Levites and priests to do their duty on this occasion. This he begins with, ver. 5. this he ends with, ver. 11. calls them Levites, to mind them of their obligation to God, calls them his sons, to mind them of their relation to him, that he expected that, *as a son with the father, they should serve with him* in the reformation of the land. (1.) He tells them what was their duty; to sanctify themselves first, by repenting of their neglects, reforming their own hearts and lives and renewing their covenants with God, to do their duty better for the time to come; and to *sanctify the house of God*, as his servants to make it clean from every thing that was disagreeable, either through the disuse as the profanation of it, and to set it up for the purposes it was made. (2.) He stirs them up to it, ver. 11. *Be not now negligent*, or remiss in your duty. Let not this good work be retarded through your carelessness. Be not deceived, so the margin. They that by their negligence in the service of God think to mock God, and put a cheat upon him, do but deceive themselves, and put a damning cheat upon their own souls. Be not secure, so some, as if there was no haste to do it, or no danger in not doing it. Men's negligence in religion is owing to their carnal security. The considerations he quickens them with, is their office: The honour God had put upon them; he has *chosen you to stand before him*; The work he expected from them; they were not chosen to be idle, to enjoy the dignity, and leave the duty to be done by others, but to serve him, and to minister to him. They must therefore be ashamed of their late remissness, and now the doors of the temple were opened again, set about their work with double diligence.

12. ¶ Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites: and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehaleleel; and of

the Gershonites: Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah: 13. And of the sons of Elizaphan Shimri, and Jehiel: and of the sons of Asaph: Zechariah, and Mattaniah: 14. And of the sons of Heman; Jehiel, and Shimei: and of the sons of Jeduthun; Shemaiah, and Uzziel. 15. And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and came according to the commandment of the king, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. 16. And the priests went in into the inner part of the house of the LORD, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD, into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it to carry it out abroad into the brook Kidron. 17. Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the porch of the LORD; so they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days; and in the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end. 18. Then they went in to Hezekiah the king, and said, We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, and the altar of burnt-offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the shew-bread table, with all the vessels thereof. 19. Moreover, all the vessels which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.

We have here busy work, and good work, needful work, the cleansing of the house of the Lord.

1. The persons employed in this work were the priests and Levites who should have kept it clean, but not having done that, were concerned to make it clean. Several of the Levites are here named; two of each of the three principal houses, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari, ver. 12. And two of each of the three families of singers, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, ver. 13. We cannot think these are named merely because they were chief in place, for then sure the high priest, or some of the heads of the courses of the priests would have been mentioned; but because they were more zealous and active than the rest. When God has work to do, he will raise up leading men to preside in it. And it is not always that first in place and rank are most fit for service, nor most forward to it. These Levites not only bestirred themselves, but *gathered their brethren* and quickened them to do according to the commandments of the king by the words of the Lord. Observe, they did according to the king's command, but with an eye to God's word; the king commanded them what was already their duty by the word of God, and in doing it they regarded God's word as a rule to them, and the king's commandment as a spur to them.

2. The work was *cleansing the house of God*, (1.) From the common dirt it had contracted while it was shut up, dust and cobwebs, and the rust of the vessels; (2.) From the idols and idolatrous altars that were set up in it, which, though kept never so neat, were a greater pollution to it than if it had been made the common sewer of the city. The priests are none of them mentioned as leading men in this work, yet none but they durst go in into the inner part of the house, no not to cleanse it, which they did, and perhaps the high priest into the holy of holies to cleanse that. And though the Levites had the honour to be the leaders in the work, they did not disdain to be the servitors to the priests, according to their office; for what filth the priests brought into court, the Levites carried to the brook Kidron. Let not men's usefulness, be it never so eminent, make them forget their place.

3. The expedition with which they did this work was very remarkable. They began on the first day of the first month, a happy beginning of the new-year, and that promised a good year; thus should every year begin with the reformation of what is amiss, and the purging away of all the defilements contracted the foregoing year by true repentance. In eight days they cleared the temple and cleaned it, and in eight days more the courts of the temple, ver. 17. Let those that do good work learn to rid work and get it done: Let what is amiss be amended quickly.

4. The report they made of it to Hezekiah was very agreeable, ver. 18, 19. They gave him an account of what they had done, because it was he that set them on work, boasted not of their own care and pains, nor did they come to him to be paid, but to let him know that all the things that had been profaned, were now sanctified according to law, and were ready to be used again whenever he pleased. They knew the good king had set his heart upon God's altar, and longed to be attending that, and therefore they insist most upon the readiness they had put that into; that the vessels of the altar were scoured and brightened, those which Ahaz in his transgression had cast away, as vessels in which there was no pleasure, those they gathered together, sanctified them, and laid them in their place before the altar. Though the vessels of the sanctuary may be profaned for a while, God will find a time and a way to sanctify them. Neither his ordinances nor his people shall be suffered to fail for ever.

20. ¶ Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the LORD. 21. And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he-goats, for a sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah: and he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the LORD. 22. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled it on the altar: likewise when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar. 23. And they brought forth the he-goats for the sin-offering, before the king and the congregation, and they laid their hands upon them: 24. And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement:

atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded *that* the burnt-offering and the sin-offering *should be made* for all Israel. 25. And he set the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps; according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets. 26. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets: 27. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar: and when the burnt-offering began, the song of the LORD began *also* with the trumpets, and with the instruments *obtained* by David king of Israel. 28. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: *and all this continued* until the burnt-offering was finished. 29. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all *that were* present with him, bowed themselves and worshipped. 30. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD, with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer: and they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped. 31. Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring sacrifices and thank-offerings into the house of the LORD. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank-offerings, and as many as were of a free heart burnt-offerings. 32. And the number of the burnt-offerings which the congregation brought, was threecore and ten bullocks, an hundred rams, and two hundred lambs: all these *were* for a burnt-offering to the LORD. 33. And the consecrated things *were* six hundred oxen, and three thousand sheep. 34. But the priests were too few, so that they could not slay all the burnt-offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them till the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites *were* more upright in heart, to sanctify themselves than the priests. 35. And also the burnt-offerings *were* in abundance, with the fat of the peace-offerings, and the drink-offerings for every burnt-offering. So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. 36. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly.

The temple being cleansed, we have here an account of the good use that was immediately made of it. A solemn assembly was called to meet the king at the temple the very next day, *ver. 20.* and very glad, no doubt, all the good people in Jerusalem were, when it said, *let us go up to the house of the Lord*, *Psalm cxxi. 1.* As soon as Hezekiah heard that the temple was ready for him, he lost no time, but made it appear he was ready for it. He particularly to go up to the house of the Lord, earlier on that day than on other days, to shew that his heart was upon his work there.

Now this day's work was to look two ways:

1. Atonement must be made for the sins of the last reign. They thought it not enough to lament and forsake those sins, but they brought a sin-offering. Even our repentance and reformation will not obtain pardon but in and through Christ, who was made sin, *i. e.* a sin-offering for us. No peace but through his blood, no not for penitents. Observe,

1. The sin-offering was for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and for Judah, *ver. 21. i. e.* to make atonement for the sins of princes, priests and people, for they had all corrupted their way. The law of Moses appointed sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the whole congregation, *Lev. iv. 1, 14. Numb. xv. 24, 25.* that the national judgments which their national sins deserved might be turned away; for this we must now have an eye to Christ the great propitiation, as well as for the remission and salvation of particular persons.

2. The law appointed only one goat for a sin offering, as on the day of atonement, *Lev. xvi. 15.* and on such extraordinary occasions as this, *Numb. xv. 24.* But they here offered seven, *ver. 23.* because the sins of the congregation had been very great and long continued in. Seven is a number of perfection: our great sin-offering is but one, yet that one perfects for ever them that are sanctified.

3. The king and the congregation, *(i. e.* the representatives of the congregation) laid their hands on the heads of the goats that were for the sin-offering, *ver. 23.* thereby owning themselves guilty before God, and expressing their desire that the guilt of the sinner might be transferred upon the sacrifice. By faith we lay our hands on the Lord Jesus, and so receive the atonement, *Rom. v. 11.*

4. Burnt offerings were offered with the sin-offerings, seven bullocks, seven rams, and seven lambs. The intention of the burnt-offerings was to give glory to the God of Israel, whom they own as the only true God, which it was proper to do at the same time that they were by the sin-offering making atonement for their offences. The blood of those as well as of the sin-offering was sprinkled upon the altar, *ver. 22.* to make reconciliation for all Israel, *ver. 24.* and not for Judah only; Christ is a propitiation, not for the sins of Israel only, but of the whole world, *1 John ii. 1, 2.*

5. While the offerings were burning upon the altar, the Levites sang the song of the Lord, *ver. 27.* the Psalms composed by David and Asaph, *ver. 30.* with the musical instruments which God by his prophets had commanded the use of, *ver. 25.* and which had been long neglected; even sorrow for sin must not put us out of tune for praising God. By faith we must rejoice in Christ Jesus as our righteousness; and our prayers and praises must ascend with his offering, to be accepted only in the virtue of it.

6. The king and all the congregation testified their consent to, and concurrence in all that was done, by bowing their heads and worshipping; expressing an awful veneration of the divine majesty by postures of adoration.

No. LXIV*.

This is taken notice of, *ver. 28, 29, 30.* It is not enough for us to be where God is worshipped if we do not ourselves worship him, and that not with bodily exercise only, which profits little, but with the heart.

2. The solemnities of this day did likewise look forward: the temple-service was to be set up again, that it might be continually kept up; and this Hezekiah calls them to, *ver. 31.* Now ye have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, have both made an atonement and made a covenant by sacrifice; are solemnly reconciled and engaged to him; now come near and bring sacrifices. Note, Our covenant with God must be pursued and improved in communion with him. Having consecrated ourselves in the first place to the Lord, we must bring the sacrifices of prayer and praise and alms to his house. Now in this work it was found,

1. That the people were free: being called to it by the king, they brought in their offerings, though not in such abundance as in the glorious days of Solomon; for Judah was now diminished, impoverished, and brought low, but according to what they had, and as much as one could expect considering their poverty and the great decay of piety among them. (1.) Some were so generous as to bring burnt-offerings, which were wholly consumed to the honour of God, and of which the offerer had no part; of this sort there were seventy bullocks, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs, *ver. 32.* (2.) Others brought peace-offerings and thank-offerings, the fat of which was burnt upon the altar, and the flesh divided between the priests and the offerers, *ver. 35.* of this sort there were six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep, *ver. 33.* Perhaps the remembrance of their sin in sacrificing on the high places made them more willing to bring their sacrifices now to God's altar.

2. That the priests were too few for the service, *ver. 34.* Many of them it is likely were suspended and laid aside as polluted and uncanonical for having sacrificed to idols in the last reign, and the rest had not the zeal that one might have expected upon such an occasion; they thought the king needed not to be so forward, that there was no such haste of opening the doors of the temple, and therefore they took no care to sanctify themselves, and being un sanctified and so unqualified they made that their excuse for being absent from the service; as if their offence would be their defence. It is recorded here to the perpetual shame of the priests, that though they were so well provided for out of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, yet they did not mind their business; here was work to do, and there wanted proper hands to do it.

3. That the Levites were forward. They had been more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests, *ver. 34.* were better affected to the work, and better prepared and qualified for it; this was their praise, and in recompence for it they had the honour to be employed in that which was the priests' work; they helped them to slay the offerings. This was not according to the law, *Lev. i. 5, 6.* but the irregularity was dispensed with in case of necessity, and that encouragement might be given to the faithful zealous Levites, and a just disgrace put upon the careless priests. What the Levites wanted in the ceremonial advantages of their birth and consecration, was abundantly made up in their eminent qualifications of skill and will to do the work.

4. All were pleased; the king and all the people rejoiced in this blessed turn of affairs, and the new face of religion which the kingdom had put on, *ver. 36.* Two things in this matter pleased them. (1.) That it was soon brought about, the thing was done suddenly, in a little time, with a great deal of ease, and without any opposition. Those that go about the work of God in faith and with resolution, will find there is not that difficulty in it which they sometimes imagine, but it will be a pleasing surprise to them to see how soon it is done. (2.) That it was plain the hand of God was in it; God had prepared the people by the secret influences of his grace, so that many of those who had in the last reign clotted on the idolatrous altars, were now as much in love with God's altar. This change God wrought on their minds, did very much expedite and facilitate the work. Let magistrates and ministers do their part towards the reformation of a land, and then let them trust God to do his, and ascribe to him the glory of what is done, especially when it is done suddenly, and is a pleasing surprise. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous.

C H A P. XXX.

In this chapter we have an account of the solemn passover which Hezekiah kept in the first year of his reign. (1.) The consultation about it, and the resolution he and his people came to for the observance of it, *ver. 2—5.* (2.) The invitation he sent to Judah and Israel to come and keep it, *ver. 1, 6—12.* (3.) The joyful celebration of it, *ver. 13—27.* And by this the reformation set on foot in the foregoing chapter was greatly advanced and established, and that mind in God's holy place clenched.

1. AND Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel. 2. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. 3. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. 4. And the thing pleased the king, and all the congregation. 5. So they established a decree, to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. 6. So the post went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria. 7. And be not like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. 8.

Now be ye not stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you: 9. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him. 10. So the posts passed from city to city, through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulon: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. 11. Nevertheless, divers of Asher and Manasseh, and of Zebulon, humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem: 12. Also in Judah, the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king, and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.

Here is, 1. A passover resolved upon: That antient feast was instituted as a memorial of the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt: it happened that the reviving of the temple service fell within the appointed days of that feast, the seventeenth day of the first month; this brought that forgotten solemnity to mind; What shall we do, saith Hezekiah, about the passover? It is a very comfortable ordinance, and has been long neglected, how shall we revive that? The time is lapsed for this year; we cannot go about it immediately, the congregation is thin, the people have not notice, the priests are not prepared, *ver. 3.* Must we defer it till another year? Many, it is likely, were for deferring it: but Hezekiah considered that by that time twelve-month the good affections of the people would cool, and it would be too long to want the benefit of the ordinance; and therefore finding a proviso in the law of Moses, that particular persons who were unclean in the first month, might keep the passover the fourteenth day of the second month, and be accepted, *Numb. ix. 11.* he doubted not but that might be extended to the congregation. Whereupon they resolved to keep the passover in the second month. Let the circumstance give way to the substance, and let not the thing itself be lost upon a nicety about the time. It is good striking while the iron is hot, and taking people when they are in a good mind. Delays are dangerous.

2. A proclamation issued out to give notice of this passover, and to summon the people to it.

1. An invitation was sent to the ten revolted tribes to stir them up to come and attend this solemnity. Letters were written to Ephraim and Manasseh to invite them to Jerusalem to keep this passover, *ver. 1.* not with any politic design to bring them back to the house of David, but with a pious design to bring them back to the Lord God of Israel; let them take who they will for their king, saith Hezekiah, so they will but take him for their God. The matters in difference between Judah and Israel, either upon a civil or sacred account shall not hinder, but that if the people of Israel will sincerely return to the Lord their God, Hezekiah will bid them as welcome to the passover as any of his own subjects. Expresses are sent post throughout all the tribes of Israel, with memorials, earnestly pressing the people to take this opportunity of returning to the God from whom they had revolted. Now here we have,

(1.) The contents of the circular letters that were dispatched away upon this occasion, in which Hezekiah discovers a great concern both for the honour of God, and for the welfare of the neighbouring kingdom, the prosperity of which he seems passionately desirous of; though he not only received no toll, tribute, or custom from it, but it had often and not long since been vexatious to his kingdom. This is rendering good for evil. Observe, 1. What it is which he presseth them to, *ver. 8.* Yield yourselves unto the Lord. Before you can come into communion with him, you must come into covenant with him. Give the hand to the Lord; so the word is, i. e. consent to take him for your God; a bargain is confirmed by giving the hand; strike this bargain. Join yourselves to him in an everlasting covenant, *Subscribe with the hand* to be his, *Isa. xlv. 5.* Give him your hand in token of giving him your heart; lay your hand to his plough; devote yourselves to his service to work for him. Yield to him, i. e. come up to his terms; come under his government; stand it not out any longer against him. Yield to him, to be absolutely and universally at his command, at his dispose; to be, and do, and have, and suffer whatever he pleaseth. In order to this, be not stiff-necked as your fathers were; let not your corrupt and wicked wills rise up in resistance of, and rebellion against the will of God; Say not, you will do what you please, but what he pleaseth. There is in the carnal mind a stiffness and obstinacy, an unaptness to comply with God; we have it from our fathers, it is bred in the bone with us: this must be conquered; and the will that had in it a spirit of contradiction, must be melted into the will of God; and to his yoke the neck must be bowed and fitted that was an iron sinew. In pursuance to this resignation to God, he presseth them to enter into his sanctuary, i. e. to attend upon him in that place which he had chosen to put his name there, and serve him in the ordinances which he had appointed. The doors of the sanctuary are now opened, and you have liberty to enter; the temple-service is now revived, and you are welcome to join in it; the king saith, come, the princes and priests say, come, whoever will, let him come. This he calls, *ver. 6.* Turning to the Lord God; for they had forsaken him, and worshipped other gods; repent now, and be converted. Thus they that through grace have turned to God themselves, should do all they can to bring others back to him. 2. What arguments he useth to persuade them to do this. (1.) You are children of Israel, and therefore stand related, stand obliged to the God of Israel, from whom you are revolted. (2.) The God you are called to return to, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God in covenant with your first fathers, who served him and yielded themselves to him; and it was their honour and happiness. (3.) Your late fathers that forsook him and trespassed against him have been given up to desolation; their apostasy and idolatry has been their ruin, as you see, *ver. 7.* Let their harms be your warnings. (4.) You yourselves are but a remnant narrowly escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria, *ver. 6.* and therefore are concerned to put yourselves under the protection of the God of your fathers that you be not quite swallowed up. (5.) This is the only way of turning away the fierceness of God's anger from you, *ver. 8.* which will certainly consume you if you continue stiff-necked. (6.) If you return to God in a way of duty, he will return to you in a way of mercy. This he begins with, *ver. 6.* and concludes with, *ver. 9.* In general, you will find him gracious and merciful, and one that will not turn away his face from you, if you seek him, notwithstanding the provocation you have

given him. Particularly, you may hope that he will turn again the captivity of your brethren that are carried away, and bring them back to their own land: now could any thing be expressed more pathetically, more lovingly? could there be a better cause, and better pleaded?

(2.) The entertainment which Hezekiah's messengers and message met with. It does not appear that Hoshea, who was now king of Israel, took any umbrage from, or gave any opposition to the dispersing of these proclamations through his kingdom, nor that he forbade his subjects to accept the invitation; but left them entirely to their liberty, they might go to Jerusalem to worship if they pleased; for though he did evil, yet not like the kings of Israel that were before him, 2 Kings xvii. 2. He saw ruin coming upon his kingdom, and if any of his subjects would try this expedient to prevent it, with all his heart. But for the people,

1. The generality of them slighted the call, and turned a deaf ear to it: The messengers went from city to city, some to one, and some to another; and used pressing instances with the people to come up to Jerusalem to keep the passover; but they were so far from complying with the message, that they abused them that brought it, laughed them to scorn, and mocked them, *ver. 10.* not only refused, but refused with disdain. Tell them of the God of Abraham, they knew him not, they had other gods to serve, Baal and Ashtaroah; tell them of the sanctuary, their high places were as good; of God's mercy and wrath, they neither dreaded the one, nor desired the other. No marvel the king's messengers were thus despitely used by this apostate race, when God's messengers were so, his servants the prophets that produced credentials from him. The destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes were now at hand, it was but two or three years after this that the king of Assyria laid siege to Samaria, which ended in the captivity of those tribes; just before this, they had not only a king of their own that permitted them to return to God's sanctuary, but a king of Judah that earnestly invited them to it: had they generally accepted this invitation, it might have prevented their ruin; but their contempt of it hastened and aggravated it, and left them inexcusable.

3. Yet there were some few that accepted the invitation: the message, though to some it was a savour of death unto death, was to others a savour of life unto life, *ver. 11.* In the worst of times God has had a remnant; so he had here, divers of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulon, (here is no mention of any out of Ephraim) humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem, i. e. were sorry for their sins, and submitted to God. Pride keeps men from yielding themselves to the Lord; when that is brought down, the work is done.

3. A command was given to the men of Judah to attend this solemnity; and they universally obeyed it, *ver. 12.* They did it with one heart, were all of a mind in it, and the hand of God gave them that one heart; for it is in the day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing: It is God that works both to will and to do. When people at any time discover an unexpected forwardness to that which is good, we must acknowledge the hand of God in it.

13. ¶ And there assembled at Jerusalem much people, to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation. 14. And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron. 15. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt-offerings into the house of the LORD. 16. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites. 17. For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers, for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the LORD. 18. For a multitude of the people, even many from Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulon, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover, otherwise than it was written: but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one, 19. That prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. 20. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

The time appointed for the passover is now come, and a very great congregation came together upon this occasion, *ver. 13.* Now here we have,

1. The preparation they made for the passover; and good preparation it was; they took away all the idolatrous altars that were found not only in the temple, but in Jerusalem, *ver. 14.* Before they kept the feast, they cast out this old leaven. The best preparation we can make for the gospel-passover, is to cast away our iniquities, our spiritual idolatries.

2. Their celebration of the passover; in this the people were so forward and zealous, that the priests and Levites blushed to see themselves outdone by the commonalty, to see them more ready to bring sacrifices, than they were to offer them. This put them upon sanctifying themselves, *ver. 16.* that the work might not stand still for want of hands to carry it on. The notice we take of the zeal of others, should make us ashamed of our own coldness, and quicken us not only to do our duty, but to do it well, and to sanctify ourselves to it. They did according to the duty of their place, *ver. 10.* sprinkling the blood upon the altar, which was a type of Christ our passover sacrificed for us.

3. The irregularities they were guilty of in this solemnity. The substance was well managed, and with a great deal of devotion; but besides that it was a month out of time, (1.) The Levites killed the passover, which should have been done by the priests only, *ver. 17.* They also assisted more than ordinarily the law allowed in offering the other sacrifices, particularly those who were for the purifying of the unclean, many of which there was now occasion for. Some think it was the offerers work not the priests, that the Levites had here the charge of. Ordinarily every man killed his lamb, but now for those that were under any ceremonial pollution the Levites did it. (2.) Many were permitted to eat the passover that were not purified according to the strictness of the law, *ver. 18.* This was the second month, and they had no warrant to put them off farther to the third month, as if it had been the first month the law had permitted them to eat it

the second. And they were loth to forbid them communicating at all, lest they should discourage new converts, and send them away complaining, whom they desired to send away rejoicing. Grotius observes from this, that ritual institutions must give way not only to a public necessity, but to a public benefit and advantage.

4. Hezekiah's prayer to God for the forgiveness of this irregularity. It was his zeal that had called them together in such haste, and he would not that any should fare the worse for being straitened of time in their preparation: he therefore thought himself concerned to be an intercessor for those that *eat the passover otherwise than it is written*, that there might not be wrath upon them from the Lord. His prayer was,

1. A short prayer, but to the purpose. *The good Lord pardon every one* in the congregation that has fixed, engaged, or *prepared his heart* to those services, though the ceremonial preparation be wanting. Note, 1. The great thing required in our attendance upon God in solemn ordinances is, that we *prepare our hearts to seek him*; that we be sincere and upright in all we do, and the inward man be engaged and employed in it, and we make heart-work of it; it is all nothing without this. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part*. Hezekiah doth not pray that this might be dispensed with, nor that the want of other things might be pardoned where there was not this, for *this is the one thing needful*, that we *seek God*, his favour, his honour, and that we set our hearts to do it. 2. Where this sincerity and fixedness of heart is, yet it is possible there may be many defects and infirmities, both the frame of the spirit and the performance of the service short of the purification of the sanctuary. Corruptions not so fully conquered, thoughts not so closely fixed, affections not so lively, faith not so operative as it should be, here is a defect in sanctuary-purification; there is nothing perfect under the sun, nor a *just man that doth good, and sinneth not*. 3. These defects need pardoning, healing grace; for omissions are sins in duty, as well as of duty. If God should deal with us in strict justice according to the best of our performances, we were undone. 4. The way to obtain pardon for our deficiencies in duty, and all the iniquities of our holy things, is to seek it of God by prayer; it is not so a pardon of course, but that it must be obtained by petition through the blood of Christ. 5. In this prayer we must take encouragement from the goodness of God. *The good Lord pardon*; for when he proclaimed his goodness, he insisted most upon this branch of it, *forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin*. 6. It is the duty of those that have the charge of others, not only to look to themselves, but to those also that are under their charge, to see wherein they are wanting, and to pray for them as Hezekiah here. See *Job i. 5*.

2. A successful prayer: *the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah*, was greatly well-pleased with his pious concern for the congregation, and in answer to his prayer *healed the people*, ver. 20. not only did not lay their sin to their charge, but graciously accepted their services notwithstanding; for healing notes not only forgiveness, *Ija. vi. 10. Psalm ciii. 3.* but comfort and peace, *Ija. lvii. 18. Mal. iv. 2*:

21. And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem, kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the LORD. 22. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD; and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace-offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. 23. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days; and they kept other seven days with gladness. 24. For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks, and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks, and ten thousand sheep; and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. 25. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. 26. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem. 27. ¶ Then the priests the Levites arose, and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling-place, even unto heaven.

After the passover followed the feast of unleavened bread, which continued seven days. How that was observed we are here told, and every thing in this account looks pleasant and lively.

1. Abundance of sacrifices were offered to God in peace-offerings, by which they both acknowledged and implored the favour of God, and on part of which the offerers feasted with their friends during these seven days, ver. 22. In token of their communion with God, and the comfort they took in his favour, and their reconciliation to him. To keep up this part of the service that God's altar might be abundantly regaled with the fat and blood, and his priests and people with the flesh of the peace-offerings. Hezekiah gave out of his own stock one thousand bullocks, and seven thousand sheep, and the princes, excited by his pious example, gave the same number of bullocks, and a greater number of sheep, and all for peace-offerings, ver. 24. By this God was honoured, the joy of the festival was kept up, and the strangers were encouraged to come again to Jerusalem. It was generously done of the king and the princes, thus plentifully to entertain the whole congregation; but what is a great estate good for, but that it puts men into a capacity of doing so much the more good. Christ feasted those that followed him. I believe neither Hezekiah nor his princes, were the poorer at the year's end for this their pious liberality.

2. Many good prayers were put up to God with the peace-offerings, ver. 22. They made confession to the Lord God of their fathers, in which the intent and meaning of the peace-offerings was directed and explained. When the priests sprinkled the blood and burnt the fat, they made confession, so did the people when they feasted on their part. They made a religious confession of their relation to God and dependence upon him; a penitent confession of their sins and infirmities; a thankful confession of God's mercies to them; and a supplicatory confession of their wants and desires; and in all these had an eye to God as the God of their fathers, a God in covenant with them.

3. There was a great deal of good preaching. The Levites (whose office it was, *Deut. xxxiii. 10.*) taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord, read and opened the scriptures, and instructed the congregation concerning God, and their duty to him; and great need there was of it, after so long a famine of the word as had been in the last reign. Hezekiah did not himself preach, but he *spoke comfortably to the Levites* that did, attended their preaching, commended their diligence, and assured them of his protection and countenance, and thereby encouraged them to study hard and take pains, and put a reputation upon them, that the people might respect and regard them the more. Princes and magistrates by owning and encouraging faithful and laborious preachers, greatly serve the interest of God's kingdom among men.

4. They sung psalms every day, ver. 21. *The Levites and priests praised the Lord day by day*, both with songs and musical instruments: Thus expressing their own, and exciting one another's joy in God, and thankfulness to him. Praising God should be much of our work in our religious assemblies.

5. Having kept the seven days of the feast in this religious manner, they had so much comfort in it that they kept other seven days, ver. 23. They did not institute any new worships, but repeated and continued the old. The case was extraordinary, they had been long without the ordinance, guilt had been contracted by the neglect of it. They had now got a very great congregation together, and were in a devout serious frame; they knew not when they might have such another opportunity, and therefore could not find in their hearts to part till they have doubled the time. Many of them were a great way from home, and had business in the country to look after, for being in the second month they were in the midst of their harvest, yet they were in no haste to return, the zeal of God's house made them forget themselves and their secular affairs. How far unlike those who snuffed at God's service, and said, *What a weariness is it?* or those who asked, *When will the sabbath be gone?* The servants of God should abound in his work.

6. All this they did with gladness, ver. 23. they all rejoiced, and particularly the strangers, ver. 25. *So there was great joy in Jerusalem*, ver. 26. Never was the like since the dedication of the temple in Solomon's time. Note, Holy duties should be performed with holy gladness; we should be forward to them, and take pleasure in them, relish the sweetness of communion with God, and look upon it as matter of unspeakable joy and comfort that we are thus favoured, and have such earnings of everlasting joy.

7. The congregation was at length dismissed with a solemn blessing, ver. 27. (1.) The priest pronounced it; for it was part of their office to *bless the people*, Numb. vi. 22, 23. in which they were both the peoples mouth to God, by way of prayer; and God's mouth to the people by way of promise; for their blessing included both. In it they testified both their desire of the peoples welfare, and their dependence upon God and that word of his grace, to which they commended him. What a comfort is it to a congregation to be sent home thus crowned? (2.) God said Amen to it. The voice of the priests, when they blessed the people, was heard in heaven, and came up to the habitation of God's holiness. When they pronounced the blessing, God commanded it, and perhaps gave some sensible token of the ratification of it. The prayer that comes up to heaven in a cloud of incense, will come down again to this earth in showers of blessings.

C H A P. XXXI.

We have here a farther account of that blessed reformation which Hezekiah was the glorious instrument of, and what farther happy advances he made in it. (1.) All the remnants of idolatry were destroyed and abolished, ver. 1. (2.) The priests and Levites were set to work again, every man in his place, ver. 2. (3.) Care was taken for their maintenance. (1.) The royal bounty to the clergy, and for the support of the temple-service, was duly paid, ver. 3. (2.) Orders were given for the raising of the peoples quota, ver. 4. (3.) The people thereupon brought in their dues abundantly, ver. 5—10. (4.) Commissioners were appointed for the due distribution of what was brought in, ver. 11—19. Lastly, Here is the general praise of Hezekiah's sincerity in all his undertakings, ver. 20, 21.

1. NOW when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces, and cut down the groves, and threw down the high places, and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned every man to his possession into their own cities. 2. ¶ And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt-offerings, and for peace-offerings, to minister and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the tents of the LORD. 3. He appointed also the king's portion of his substance, for the burnt-offerings, to wit, for the morning and evening burnt-offerings, and the burnt-offerings for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the LORD. 4. Moreover, he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem, to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the LORD. 5. ¶ And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the first-fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. 6. And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the LORD their God, and laid them by heaps. 7. In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. 8. And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed

blest the LORD and his people Israel. 9. Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. 10. And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok, answered him and said; Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty; for the LORD hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.

We have here an account of what was done after the passover. What was wanting in the solemnities of preparation for it before, was made up in that which is better, a due improvement of it after. When the religious exercises of a Lord's-day or a communion are finished, we must not think that then the work is done: No, then the hardest part of our work begins, which is to exemplify the impressions of the ordinance upon our minds in all the instances of a holy conversation. So it was here; when all this was finished, there was more to be done.

1. They applied themselves with vigour to destroy all the monuments of idolatry. The king had done what he could of this kind, 2 Kings xviii. 4. but the people could discover those profane relics, which escaped the eye of the king's officers, and therefore they went out to see what they could do, ver. 1. This was done immediately after the passover. Note, The comfort of communion with God should kindle in us a holy zeal and indignation against sin, against every thing that is offensive to God. If our hearts have been made to burn within us at an ordinance, that spirit of burning will consume the dross of corruption. *What have I now to do any more with idols?* Their zeal here in destroying the images and groves, the high places and altars, appeared, (1.) In that they did this not only in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, but in those of Ephraim and Manasseh; some think those cities are meant, which were come under the protection and the jurisdiction of the kings of Judah; others think, that Hoshea king of Israel not forbidden it, their zeal carried them out to the destruction of idolatry, even in many parts of his kingdom. At least those that came out of Ephraim and Manasseh to keep the passover, as many did, chap. xxx. 18. destroyed all their own images and groves, and did the like for as many more as they had influence upon, or could make an interest in for leave to do it: we should not only reform ourselves, but do all we can to reform others too. (2.) They destroyed all, they utterly destroyed all, they spared none for favour or affection either to the images or to their worshippers; though never so ancient, never so costly, never so beautiful, and never so well patronized, yet they must all down. Those that sincerely set themselves against sin, will set themselves against all sin. (3.) They would not return to their houses, though they had been long absent, till this was done: They could not be easy, nor think themselves safe in their cities, as long as the images and groves, those betrayers and destroyers of their country, were left standing. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah pointed to this, when a little before he spoke of a day in which men should cast away the very idols that themselves had made. So surprising was the blessed change, *Ist. ii. 20.—xxxi. 6, 7.*

2. Hezekiah revived and restored the courses of the priests and Levites which David had appointed, and which had of late been put out of course, ver. 2. The temple-service was put into method again, to run in the old channel: Every man was made to know his work, his place, his time, and what was expected from him. Good order contributes much to the carrying on of a good work. The priests were appointed in their courses for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, the Levites in their courses were some to minister to the priests, others to give thanks and praise. See 1 Chron. xxiii. 4, 5. And all this in the gates or courts of the tents of the Lord. The temple is here called a tent, because the temple-privileges are movable things, and this temple was shortly to be removed.

3. He appropriated a branch of the revenue of his crown to the maintenance and support of the altar; though the people were to be at the charge of the daily offerings, and those on the sabbaths, new moons, and feasts, yet rather than they should be burdened with the expence, he allowed out of his own estate, or out of the exchequer for all those offerings, ver. 3. It was a generous act of piety, wherein he consulted God's honour, and his people's ease, as a faithful servant to him, and a tender father to them. Let princes and great men reckon that well bestowed, and set out to the best interest, which they give for the support and encouragement of religion in their country.

4. He issued out an order to the inhabitants of Jerusalem first, ver. 4. that they who were nearest the temple, and both saved and got by being so, might give a good example to others; but which was afterwards extended to, by at least admitted by, the cities of Judah; that they should carefully pay in their dues by the law to the priests and Levites. This had been long neglected, which made the work to be neglected; For a scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. But Hezekiah having himself been liberal, may with a good grace require his subjects to be just to the temple-service. And observe the ends he aims at in recovering and restoring to the priests and Levites their portion; that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord, in the study of it, and in doing their duty according to it. Observe here, (1.) That it is fit ministers should be not only maintained but encouraged, that they should not only be kept to do their work, but that they should also have wherewith to live comfortably, that they may do it with cheerfulness. (2.) That yet they are to be maintained, not in idleness, pride and luxury, but in the law of the Lord, in their observance of it themselves, and teaching others the good knowledge of it.

5. The people thereupon brought in their tithes very readily; they wasted nothing but to be called upon; and therefore as soon as the commandment came abroad, the first fruits and all the holy things were duly brought in, ver. 5, 6. What the priests had occasion for for themselves and their families they made use of, and the overplus was laid in heaps, ver. 6. All harvest-time they were increasing these heaps, as the fruits of the earth were gathered in, for God was to have his dues out of them all. Though a prescription may be to a *modus decimandi*; yet it cannot be pleaded *pro non decimando*. When harvest ended they finished their heaps, ver. 7. Now here we have, (1.) The account giving to Hezekiah concerning those heaps. He questioned with the priests and Levites concerning them, why they did not use what was paid in, but hoarded it up thus? ver. 9. To which it was answered, that they had made use of all they had occasion for, for the maintenance of themselves and their families, and for their winter-store, and this was that which was left over and above, ver. 10. They did not hoard these heaps for covetousness, but to shew what plentiful provision God by his law had made for them, if they could but have it collected and brought in. And that they who conscientiously gave God his dues out of their estates, bring a blessing upon all they have; *Since they began to bring in the offerings, the Lord has blessed his people.* See for this, Hag. ii. 19. Try me, saith God, if you will not otherwise trust me, whether upon your bringing the tithes into the store-house, you have

not a blessing poured out upon you; *Mal. iii. 10, 11. Ezek. xlv. 30.* (2.) The acknowledgment which king and princes made of it, ver. 8. They gave thanks to God for his good providence, which gave them something to bring, and his good grace which gave them hearts to bring it; And they also blessed the people; i. e. commended them for their doing well now, without reproaching them for their former neglects. It is observable, that after they had tasted the sweetness of God's ordinance in the late comfortable passover they had kept, they were thus free in maintaining the temple-service. They that experience the benefit of a settled ministry will not grudge the expence of it.

11. ¶ Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of the LORD; and they prepared them. 12. And brought in the offerings, and the tithes, and the dedicated things faithfully: over which Cononiah the Levite was ruler, and Shimei his brother was the next. 13. And Jachiel, and Azariah, and Nahath, and Asahel, and Jerimoth, and Jozabad, and Eliel; and Ishmachiah, and Mahath, and Benaiah, were overseers, under the hand of Cononiah, and Shimei his brother, at the commandment of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of the house of God. 14. And Kore the son of Innah the Levite, the porter toward the east, was over the free-will offering of God, to distribute the oblations of the LORD, and the most holy things. 15. And next him were Eden, and Miniamin, and Jeshua, and Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priest, in their set office, to give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small. 16. Beside their genealogy of males, from three years old and upward, even unto every one that entereth into the house of the LORD, his daily portion for their service in their charges, according to their courses; 17. Both to the genealogy of the priests by the house of their fathers, and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, in their charges by their courses; 18. And to the genealogy of all their little ones, their wives and their sons, and their daughters, through all the congregation: for in their set office they sanctified themselves in holiness. 19. Also of the sons of Aaron the priests, which were in the fields of the suburbs of their cities, in every several city, the men that were expressed by name, to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all that were reckoned by genealogies, among the Levites. 20. ¶ And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. 21. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law and in the commandments to seek his God, he did it with all his heart; and prospered.

Here is, 1. Two particular instances of the care of Hezekiah concerning church-matters; having put them into good order, to keep them so. The tithes and other holy things being brought in, he provided,

(1.) That they should be carefully laid up, and not left exposed in loose heaps, liable to be wasted and embezzled; he ordered chambers to be made ready in some of the courts of the temple for store-chambers, ver. 11. and into them the offerings were brought, and there kept under lock and key, ver. 12, 13. Treasurers or store-keepers were appointed, which had the oversight of them to see that *moth and rust* did not corrupt them, nor *thieves break through to steal*. This wisdom of laying up the surplusage in days of plenty we may learn from the ant, who *provideth meat in summer*. The laying up in store what was brought in, was an encouragement to people to pay in their contributions. That will be given cheerfully to the public which appears to be well husbanded.

(2.) That they should be faithfully laid out to the uses they were intended for. Church-treasures are not to be hoarded any longer than till there is occasion for them, even the rust will be a witness against them that do. Officers were appointed, men (no doubt) of approved wisdom and faithfulness, to distribute the oblations of the Lord, and the most holy things among the priests, ver. 14 and to see that they all had a competent maintenance for themselves and their families. The law provided sufficient for them all, and therefore if some had too little it must be because others had too much; to prevent such inequality these officers were to go by some certain rule of proportion in the disposal of the incomes of the temple. It is said of the priests here, ver. 18, that in their set office they sanctified themselves; in faith they sanctified themselves, for the world is; i. e. as Bishop Patrick explains it, they attended their ministry at the house of God, not doubting but they should be provided of all things necessary; now because they served God in that confidence, care was taken that they should not be made ashamed of their hope. They that sanctify themselves to God and his service in faith, believing that he will see them wait nothing that is good for them, *verily they shall be full*.

Out of the offerings of the Lord distribution was made, (1.) To the priests in the cities, ver. 15. who staid at home while their brethren went to Jerusalem, and did good there in teaching the good knowledge of the Lord; the preaching priests were maintained as well as the sacrificing priests, and they that abode by the staff, as they that warred the warfare. (2.) To those that entered into the house of the Lord, all the males from three years old and upward, for the male children even at that tender age, it seems, were allowed to come into the temple with their parents, and shared with them in this distribution, ver. 16. (3.) Even the Levites from twenty years old and upwards had their share, ver. 17. (4.) The wives and children of the priests and Levites had a comfortable maintenance out of those offerings, ver. 18. In maintaining ministers regard must be had to their families, that not they only but theirs may have food convenient. In some countries where ministers have their salary paid them by the state, an addition is made to it upon the birth of a child. (5.) The priests in the country, that lived in the fields of the suburbs, were not overlooked in this ministration, ver. 19. They also

also had their share who were inhabitants of the villages, though they may be supposed to live at a less expense.

2. A general character of Hezekiah's services for the support of religion, *ver. 20, 21.* (1.) That his pious zeal reached to all the parts of his kingdom, *thus he did throughout all Judah*, every part of the country, and not those only that lay next him shared in the good fruits of his government. (2.) That he sincerely designed to please God, and approved himself to him in all he did: *he wrought that which was good before the Lord his God*; all his care was to do that which should be accepted of God, which was right, (*i.e.* agreeable to natural equity) and truth (*i.e.* agreeable to divine revelation, and his covenant with God) *before the Lord*; to do according to that law which is holy, just and good. (3.) That what he began he went through with, prosecuted it with vigour, and *did it with all his heart.* (4.) That all his good intentions were brought to a good issue; whatever he did in the service of the house of God, and in the government of his kingdom, he prospered in it. What is undertaken with a sincere regard to the glory of God, will succeed to our own honour and comfort at last.

C H A P. XXXII.

This chapter continues and concludes the history of the reign of Hezekiah.

(1.) *The descent which Sennacherib made upon him, and the care he took to fortify himself, his city, and the minds of his people, against that enemy, ver. 1—8.* (2.) *The insolent blasphemous letters and messages which Sennacherib sent him, ver. 9—19.* (3.) *The real answer God gave to Sennacherib's blasphemies, and to Hezekiah's prayers, in the total rout of the Assyrian army to the shame of Sennacherib, and the honour of Hezekiah, ver. 20—23.* (4.) *Hezekiah's sickness and his recovery from that, his sin and his recovery from that, with the honours that attended him living and dead, ver. 24—33.*

1. **A**FTER these things and the establishment thereof, Sennacherib king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fenced cities, and thought to win them for himself. 2. And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem: He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men, to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him. 4. So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the king of Assyria come, and find much water? 5. Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance. 6. And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, 7. Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. 8. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

1. Here is, 1. The formidable design of Sennacherib against Hezekiah's kingdom, and the vigorous attempt he made upon it. This Sennacherib was now, as Nebuchadnezzar was afterwards, the terror and scourge and great oppressor of that part of the world, that aimed to raise a boundless monarchy for himself upon the ruins of all his neighbours; his predecessor Salmanassar had lately made himself master of the kingdom of Israel, and carried the ten tribes captives: Sennacherib thought in like manner to win Judah to himself. Pride and ambition put men upon grasping at universal dominion; and it is observable that just about this time Rome was built by Romulus, a city which afterwards came to reign more than any other had done *over the kings of the earth.* Sennacherib invaded Judah immediately after the reformation of it, and the re-establishment of religion in it. *After these things he entered into Judah, ver. 1.* (1.) It was well ordered by the divine providence that he did not give them this disturbance before the reformation was finished and established, which might have put a stop to it. (2.) Perhaps he intended to chastise Hezekiah for destroying that idolatry, which he himself was devoted to; he looked upon Hezekiah as profane in what he had done, and that he had thrown himself out of the divine protection, and might therefore be easily made a prey of. (3.) God ordered it at this time that he might have an opportunity of shewing himself strong on the behalf of this returning reforming people. He brought this trouble upon them that he might have the honour, and might put on them the honour of their deliverance. *After these things and the establishment thereof,* one would expect to hear of nothing but perfect peace, and that none durst meddle with a people thus qualified for the divine favour, yet the next news we hear is, that a threatening destroying army enters the country, and is ready to lay all waste: it is possible we may be in the way of our duty, and yet meet with trouble and danger: God orders it so for the trial of our confidence in him, and the manifestation of his care concerning us. The little opposition which Sennacherib met with in entering Judah, made him think of nothing but all was his own. He thought to win all the fenced cities, *ver. 1.* and purposed to fight against Jerusalem, *ver. 2.* See 2 Kings xviii. 7—13.

2. The preparation which Hezekiah prudently made against this storm that threatened him. *He took counsel with his princes* what he should do, what measures he should take, and with their advice he provided, (1.) That the country should give him a cold reception, for he took care he should find no water in it, and then his army must perish for thirst, or at least that there should be a scarcity of water, by which it would be weakened, and disheartened for service. A powerful army, if it want water but a few days, will be but a heap of dry dust. All hands were set on work presently to stop up the fountains and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, turning that (it is probable) into the city by pipes under ground. Such as this is the policy commonly practised now-a-days of destroying the forage

before an invading army. (2.) That the city should give him a warm reception: in order to this he repaired the walls, raised towers, and made darts, or as it is in the margin, *swords or weapons*, and shields in abundance, *ver. 5.* and appointed captains, *ver. 6.* Note, Those that trust God with their safety, must yet use proper means for their safety, else they tempt him, and do not trust him. *God will provide, but so must we also.*

3. The encouragement which he gave to his people to depend upon God in his distress. He gathered them together in a broad open street, and *spoke comfortably to them, ver. 6.* He had a good heart on it himself, and was confident it would issue well; was not like his father, who had much guilt to terrify him, and no faith to encourage him; so that in a time of public danger *his heart was moved, as the trees of wood are moved with the wind*, and then he marvel that *the heart of his people was so too, Isa. vii. 2.* With what he said, he put life into his people, his captains especially, and *spoke to their heart*, as the word is. (1.) He endeavours to keep down their fears. *Be strong and courageous*, do not think of surrendering the city or capitulating, but resolve to hold it out to the last man: do not think of losing the city, nor of falling into the enemy's hand; there is no danger. Let the soldiers be bold and brave, make good their posts, stand to their arms, and fight manfully, and let the citizens encourage them to do so. *Be not afraid or dismayed for the king of Assyria.* The prophet had thus encouraged them from God, *Isa. x. 24.* *Be not afraid of the Assyrian*; and here the king from him. Now it was that *the sinners in Zion were afraid, Isa. xxxiii. 14.* but the righteous dwell on high, *ver. 15, 16.* and meditated terror so as to conquer it, *ver. 18.* which refers to this here. (2.) He endeavours to keep up their faith, in order to the silencing and suppressing of their fears. He hath a *multitude with him*, and yet there be *more with us than with him*: for we have God with us, and how many do you reckon him for? with him is an arm of flesh, which he trusts to; but *with us is the Lord*, whose power is irresistible; our God, whose promise is inviolable; a God in covenant with us, *to help us, and to fight our battles*, not only to help us to fight them, but to fight them for us, if he please: and so he did here. Note, a believing confidence in God will help us above the prevailing fear of man. He that *fareth the fury of the oppressor, forgetteth the Lord his maker, Isa. li. 12, 13.* It is likely, Hezekiah said more to this purpose, and the people rested themselves upon what he said, not merely upon his word, but on the things he said concerning the presence of God with them and his power to relieve them. The effect of this made them easy. Let the good subjects and soldiers of Jesus Christ rest themselves thus upon his word, and boldly say, *Since God is for us, who can be against us?*

9. ¶ After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem (but he himself laid siege against Lachish, and all his power with him) unto Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto all Judah that were at Jerusalem, saying, 10. Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, Whereon do you trust, that ye abide in the siege in Jerusalem? 11. Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst, saying, The LORD our God shall deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 12. Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall worship before one altar, and burn incense upon it? 13. Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? 14. Who was there among all the gods of those nations, that my fathers utterly destroyed; that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? 15. Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him: for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand? 16. And his servants spake yet more against the LORD God, and against his servant Hezekiah. 17. He wrote also letters to rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. 18. Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews speech unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them, that they might take the city. 19. And they spake against the God of Jerusalem as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man. 20. And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed, and cried to heaven. 21. ¶ And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria: so he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels, slew him there with the sword. 22. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side. 23. And many brought gifts unto the LORD to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.

This story of the rage and blasphemy of Sennacherib, Hezekiah's prayer, and the deliverance of Jerusalem by the destruction of the Assyrian army,

we had more at large in the book of Kings, 2 Kings xviii. and xix. It is contracted here, yet large enough to shew these three things:

1. The impiety and malice of the church's enemies. Sennacherib has his hands full in besieging Lachish, *ver. 9.* but hears that Hezekiah is fortifying Jerusalem, and encouraging his people to stand it out; and therefore before he came in person to besiege it, he sends messengers to make speeches, and himself writes letters to Hector Hezekiah and his people into a surrender of the city. See (1.) His great malice against the king of Judah, in endeavouring to withdraw his subjects from their allegiance to him. He doth not treat with Hezekiah as a man of honour would have done, nor propose fair terms to him, but useth means and base artifices, unbecoming a crowned head, to terrify the common people and persuade them to desert him: He represents Hezekiah as one that designed to deceive his subjects into their ruin, and betray them to *famine and thirst*, *ver. 11.* as one that had done them great wrong, and exposed them already to the divine pleasure by taking away the high places and altars, *ver. 12.* and that against the common interest of his people held out against a force that would certainly be their ruin, *ver. 15.* (2.) His great impiety against the God of Israel, the God of Jerusalem he is called, *ver. 19.* because that was the place he had chosen to put his name there, and because that was the place that was now threatened by the enemy, and which the divine providence had under its special protection. This proud blasphemer compares the great Jehovah the Maker of heaven and earth, with the dunghill-gods of the nations, the work of men's hands, and thinks him no more able to deliver his worshippers, than they were to deliver theirs, *ver. 19.* As if an infinite and eternal Spirit had no more wisdom and power than a stone or the stock of a tree. He boasts of his triumphs over the gods of the nations, that they could none of them protect their people, *ver. 13, 14, 15.* and thence infers not only, *How shall your God deliver you?* *ver. 14.* but as if he were inferior to them all, *How much less shall your God deliver you?* as if he were less able to help than any of them. Thus did they rail: rail in writing (which being more deliberate, is so much the worse) on the Lord God of Israel, as if he were a cypher and an empty name, like all the rest, *ver. 17.* Sennacherib in the instructions he gave, said more than enough; but as if his blasphemies had been too little, his servants, who learned insolence from their master, spake yet more than he bid them against the Lord God, and his servant Hezekiah, *ver. 16.* And God relents, and will reckon for what is said against his servants, as well as what is said against himself. And all this was intended to frighten the people from their hope in God; which David's enemies sought to take him off from, *Psal. xli. 1.—xlii. 10.* saying, *There is no help for him in God*, *Psal. iii. 2.—lxxi. 11.* Thus he hoped to take the city by weakening the hands of those that should defend it. Satan in his temptations aims to destroy our faith in God's all-sufficiency, knowing he gains his point if he can do that; as we keep our ground, in our faith fail not, *Luke xxii. 32.*

2. The duty and interest of the church's friends; and that is, in the day of distress to pray and cry to heaven: So Hezekiah did and the prophet Isaiah, *ver. 20.* It was a happy time when the king and the prophet joined thus in prayer. Is any troubled? Is any terrified? Let them pray: So we engage God for us, so we encourage ourselves in him. Praying to God is here called crying to heaven, because we are in prayer to eye him as our Father in heaven, whence he beholds the children of men, and where he has prepared his throne.

3. The power and goodness of the church's God: He is able both to controul his enemies, be they never so high, and to relieve his friends, be they never so low: And as the blasphemies of his enemies engage him against them, *Deut. xxxii. 27.* so the prayers of his people engage him for them; they did so here: (1.) The army of the Assyrians was cut off by the sword of an angel, which triumphed particularly in the slaughter of the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains, who defied the sword of any man. God delights to abase the proud and secure. The Targum saith, The word of the Lord (the eternal Word) sent Gabriel to do this execution, and that was done by lightning and in the passover-night; that was the night in which the angel destroyed the first-born in Egypt. But that was not all, (2.) The king of the Assyrians having received this disgrace, was cut off by the sword of his own sons: They that came forth of his own bowels slew him, *ver. 21.* Thus was he mortified first, and then murdered; shamed first, and then slain. Evil pursues sinners; and when they escape one mischief, they run upon another unseen.

Now by this work of wonder, (1.) God was glorified, as the protector of his people: Thus he saved Jerusalem, not only from the hand of Sennacherib, but from the hand of all other; for such a deliverance as this was an earnest of much mercy in store, and he guided them, *i. e.* he guarded them on every side, God defends his people by directing them, shews them what they should do, and so saves them from what is designed or done against them. For this many brought gifts unto the Lord, when they saw the great power of God in the defence of his people. Strangers were thereby induced to supplicate his favour, and enemies to deprecate his wrath, and both brought gifts to his temple in token of their care and desire. (2.) Hezekiah was magnified as the favourite and particular care of heaven; many brought presents to him, (*ver. 22, 23.*) in token of the honour they had for him, and to make an interest in him. By the favour of God, enemies are lost, and friends gained.

24. ¶ In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the LORD: and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. 25. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. 26. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart (both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem) so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah. 27. ¶ And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels. 28. Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. 29. Moreover, he provided him cities, and possession of flocks, and herds in abundance: for God had given him substance very much. 30. This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper water-course of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west-side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. 31. ¶ Howbeit, in

the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart. 32. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 33. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death: and Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

Here we conclude the story of Hezekiah, with an account of three things concerning him.

1. His sickness, and his recovery from it, *ver. 27.* It is but briefly mentioned here, we had a large narrative of it, 2 Kings xx. His disease seemed likely to be mortal. In the extremity of it he prayed, God answered him, and gave him a sign that he should recover; the going back of the sun ten degrees.

2. His sin, and his repentance for that; this was also more largely related, 2 Kings xx. 12, &c. yet several things are here observed concerning it, which we had not there.

(1.) The occasion of it was the king of Babylon's sending an honourable embassy to him to congratulate his recovery: But here it is added, that they came to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, *ver. 31.* either the destruction of the Assyrian army, or the going back of the sun: The Assyrians were their enemies, they came to enquire concerning their fall, that they might triumph in it: The sun was their god, they came to enquire concerning the favour he had shewn to Hezekiah, that they might honour him whom their God honoured, *ver. 31.* These miracles were wrought to alarm and awaken a stupid careless world, and turn them from dumb and lame idols to the living God; and men were startled by them, but not converted till a greater wonder was done in that land in the appearance of Jesus Christ, *Matth. ii. 1, 2.*

(2.) God left him to himself in it, to try him, *ver. 31.* God by the power of his almighty grace could have prevented the sin; but he permitted it for wise and holy ends, that by this trial and his weakness, in it he might know, *i. e.* it might be known (an unusual Hebraism) that was in his heart; that he was not so perfect in grace as he thought he was, but had his follies and infirmities as other men: God left him to himself to be proud of his wealth, to keep him from being proud of his holiness. It is good for us to know ourselves and our own weakness and sinfulness, that we may not be conceited, or self-confident, but may always think meanly of ourselves, and live in a dependence upon divine grace. We know not the corruption of our own hearts, nor what we shall do if God leave us to ourselves. *Lord, lead us not into temptation.*

(3.) His sin was, that his heart was lifted up, *ver. 25.* He was proud of the honour God had put upon him in so many instances; the honour his neighbours did him in bringing him presents: and now that the king of Babylon should send an embassy to him to cure, and court him; this exalted him above measure. When Hezekiah had destroyed other idolatries, he began to idolize himself. O what need have great men, and good men, and useful men, to study their own infirmities and follies, and their obligations to free grace, that they may never think highly of themselves, and to beg earnestly of God, that he will hide pride from them and always keep them humble!

(4.) The aggravation of his sin was, that he made so ill a return to God for his favours to him, making even those favours the food and fuel of his pride, *ver. 25.* He rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him. Note, It is justly expected that they who have received mercy from God, should study to make some suitable returns for the mercies they have received; and if they do not, their ingratitude will certainly be charged upon them. Though we cannot render an equivalent, or the payment of a debt, we must render the acknowledgment of a favour, *What shall I render, that may be accepted?* *Psal. cxvi. 12.*

(5.) The divine displeasure he was under for this sin: though it was but a heart sin, and the overt act seemed not only innocent but civil, the shewing of his treasures to a friend, yet wrath came upon him and his kingdom for it, *ver. 25.* Note, Pride is a sin that God hates as much as any other, and particularly in his own people. They that exalt themselves must expect to be abased, and put under humbling providences. Wrath came on David for his pride in numbering the people.

(6.) His repentance for this sin. He humbled himself for the pride of his heart. Note, 1. Though God may, for wise and holy ends, suffer his people to fall into sin, yet he will not suffer them to lie still in it; they shall not be utterly cast down. 2. Heart-sins are to be repented of though they go no further. 3. Self-humiliation is a necessary branch of repentance. 4. Pride of heart, by which we have lifted up ourselves, is a sin for which we ought in a special manner to humble ourselves. 5. People ought to mourn for the sins of their rulers. The inhabitants of Jerusalem humbled themselves with Hezekiah; either because they knew they had also been guilty of the same sin, or at least feared they might share in the punishment. When David in his pride numbered the people they all snarled for it.

(7.) The reprieve granted thereupon. The wrath came not in his days; while he lived there was peace and truth; so much doth repentance avail to put by, or at least put off, the token of God's anger.

3. Here is the honour done to Hezekiah: (1.) By the providence of God while he lived. He had exceeding much riches and honour, *ver. 27.* replenished his stores, victualled his camps, fortified his city; and did all he wished to do; for God had given him substance very much, *ver. 29.* Among his great performances, his turning the water-course of Gihon is mentioned, *ver. 30.* which was done upon occasion of Sennacherib's invasion, *ver. 3, 4.* The water had come into that which is called the *old pool*, *Isa. xxii. 11.* and the *upper pool*, *Isa. vii. 3.* but he gathered the waters into a new place, for the greater convenience of the city, called the *lower pool*, *Isa. xxii. 9.* And in general, he prospered in all his works, for they were good works. (2.) By the respects paid to his memory when he was dead. (1.) The prophet Isaiah wrote his life and reign, *ver. 32.* His acts and his goodness, or piety, part of the honour of which is to be recorded and remembered for example to others. (2.) The people did him honour at his death, *ver. 33.* buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres, made as great burning for him as for Aza; or, which is a much greater honour, made great lamentation for him, as for Josiah. See how the honour of serious godliness is manifested in the consciences of men. Though it is feared the generality of the people did not heartily comply with the reforming kings, yet they could not but praise their endeavours for reformation, and the memory of those kings was blessed among them. It is a debt we owe to those who have been eminently useful

useful in their day, to do them honour at their death, when they are out of the reach of flattery, and we have seen the end of their conversation: The due payment of this debt, will be an encouragement to others to do likewise.

C H A P. XXXIII.

In this chapter we have the history of the reign, 1. Of Manasseh, who reigned long. (1.) His wretched apostacy from God, and revolt to idolatry and all wickedness, ver. 1—10. (2.) His happy return to God in his affliction; his repentance, ver. 11—13. His reformation, ver. 15—17. and prosperity, ver. 14. with the conclusion of his reign, ver. 18—20. 2. Of Amon, who reigned very wickedly, ver. 21—23. and soon ended his days unhappily, ver. 24, 25.

1. **M**ANASSEH was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: 2. But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 3. ¶ For he built again the high places, which Hezekiah his father had broken down; and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4. Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, in Jerusalem shall my name be forever. 5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven, in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6. And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. 7. And he set a carved image (the idol which he had made) in the house of God, of which God had said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever. 8. Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers: so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law, and the statute and ordinances by the hand of Moses. 9. So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. 10. And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

We have here an account of the wickedness of Manasseh, it is the same almost word for word with that which we had, 2 Kings xxi. 1—9. and took a melancholy view of it; it is no such pleasing subject that we should delight to dwell upon it again. This foolish young prince, in contradiction to the good example and good education his father gave him, abandoned himself to all impiety, transcribed the abominations of the heathen, ver. 2. ruined the established religion, and unravelled his father's glorious reformation, ver. 3. profaned the house of God with his idolatry, ver. 4, 5. dedicated his children to Moloch, and made the devil's lying oracles his guides and counsellors, ver. 6. In contempt of the choice God made of Sion to be his rest for ever, and Israel to be his covenant people, ver. 8. and the fair terms he stood upon with him; he embraced other gods, profaned God's chosen temple, and debauched his chosen people, he made them to err, and do worse than the heathen, ver. 9. for if the unclean spirit return, he brings with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself. That which aggravated the sin of Manasseh was that God spake to him and his people, by the prophets, but they would not hearken, ver. 10. We may here admire the grace of God in speaking to them, and their obstinacy in turning a deaf ear to him, that either their badness did not quite turn away his goodness, but still waited to be gracious: or that his goodness did not turn them from their badness, but still they hated to be reformed.

Now from this let us learn, 1. That it is no new thing, but a very sad thing, for the children of godly parents to turn aside from that good way of God in which they have been trained up. Parents may give many good things to their children, but they cannot give them grace. 2. Corruptions in worship are such diseases of the church, as even then, when they seemed to be cured, it is very apt to relapse into again. 3. The God of this world had strangely blinded mens mind, and has a wonderful power over those that are led captive by him, else he could not draw them from God their best friend, to depend upon their sworn enemy.

11. ¶ Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. 12. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 13. And prayed unto him, and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God. 14. Now after this, he built a wall without the city of David, on the west-side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish-gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. 15. And he took

away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. 16. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace-offerings, and thank-offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. 17. Nevertheless, the people did sacrifice still in the high places yet unto the LORD their God only. 18. ¶ Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. 19. His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sin, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers. 20. ¶ So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

We have seen Manasseh by his wickedness undoing the good that his father had done; here we have him by repentance undoing the evil that he himself had done. It is strange this was not so much as mentioned in the book of Kings, nor doth any thing appear there to the contrary, but that he persisted and perished in his sin. But, perhaps the reason was, because the design of that history was to shew the wickedness of the nation which brought destruction upon them, and this repentance of Manasseh, and the benefit of it being personal only, and not national, it is overlooked there; yet here it is fully related, and a memorable instance it is of the riches of God's pardoning mercy, and the power of his renewing grace. Here is,

1. The occasion of Manasseh's repentance; and that was his afflictions: In his distress he did not (like that king Ahaz) trespass yet more against God, but humbled himself and returned to God. Sanctified afflictions often prove happy means of conversion. What his distress was we are here told, ver. 11. God brought a foreign enemy upon him; the king of Babylon that courted his father who faithfully served God, invaded him now he was treacherously departed from God. He is here called king of Assyria, because he had made himself master of Assyria, which he would the easier do for the defeat of Sennacherib's army, and the destruction of it before Jerusalem. He aimed at the treasures which the ambassadors had seen, and all those precious things; but God sent him to chastise a sinful people, and reduce a straying prince. The captains took Manasseh among the thorns, in some bush or other, perhaps in his garden, where he had hid himself: Or, it is spoken figuratively; he was perplexed in his counsels, and embarrassed in his affairs: He was, as we say, in the briars, and knew not which way to extricate himself, and so became an easy prey to the Assyrian captains; who, no doubt, plundered his house, and took away what they pleased, as Isaiah had foretold, 2 Kings xx. 17, 18. What was Hezekiah's pride was their prey. They bound Manasseh, who had been held before with the cords of his own iniquity, and carried him prisoner to Babylon. About what time of his reign this was we are not told; the Jews say it was in his twenty-second year.

2. The expressions of his repentance, ver. 12, 13. when he was in affliction, he had time to bethink himself and reason enough too: he saw what he had brought himself to by his sin; he found the gods he had served unable to help him: He knew that repentance was the only way of restoring his affairs, and therefore to him he returned from whom he had revolted. (1.) He was convinced that Jehovah is the only living and true God. Then he knew, i. e. he believed and considered that the Lord he was God; he might have known it at a less expence, if he would have given due attendance and credit to the word written and preached: but it was better pay this dear for the knowledge of God, than perish in ignorance and unbelief. Had he been a prince in the palace of Babylon, it is probable he had been confirmed in his idolatry; but being a captive in the prisons of Babylon, he was convinced of it, and reclaimed from it. (2.) He applied himself to him as his God now; renouncing all others, and resolving to cleave to him only; the God of his fathers, and a God in covenant with him. He humbled himself greatly before him; was truly sorry for his sins, ashamed of them, and afraid of the wrath of God. It becomes sinners to humble themselves before the face of that God they have offended: It becomes sufferers to humble themselves under the hand of that God that corrects them, and to accept the punishment of their iniquity. Our hearts should be humble under humbling providences; then we accommodate ourselves to them, and answer God's end in them. (4.) He prayed to him; for the pardon of sin, and the return of his favour. Prayer is the relief of penitents, the relief of the afflicted. That is a good prayer, and very pertinent in this case, which we find among the apocryphal books, entitled, *The prayer of Manasseh, king of Judah, when he was holden captive in Babylon*; whether it was his or no, is uncertain; if it were, in it he gives glory to God, as the God of their fathers and their righteous seed: As the Creator of the world, a God, whose anger is unsupportable, and yet his merciful promise unmeasurable: He pleads that God has promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned, and has appointed repentance unto sinners that may be saved not unto the just, as to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but to me, (saith he) that am a sinner; for I have sinned above the number of the sand of the sea; so he confesseth his sin largely, and aggravates it, pray forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not; pleads, Thou art the God of them that repent, &c. and concludes, Therefore I will praise thee for ever, &c.

3. God's gracious acceptance of his repentance. God was intreated of him, and heard his supplication. Though affliction drives us to God, he will not therefore reject us, if in sincerity we seek for him, afflictions are sent on purpose to bring us to him. As a token of God's favour to him he made a way for his escape; afflictions are continued no longer than till they have done their work; when Manasseh is brought back to his God and to his duty, he shall soon be brought back to his kingdom. See how ready God is to accept and welcome returning sinners, and how swift to shew mercy. Let not great sinners despair, when Manasseh himself, upon his repentance, found favour with God; in him God shewed forth a pattern of long-suffering, as 1 Tim. i. 16. Isa. i. 17.

4. The fruits meet for repentance, which he brought forth after his return to his own land, ver. 15, 16. (1.) He turned from his sins, Took away the strange gods, the images of them, and that idol (whatever it was) which he had set up with so much solemnity in the house of the Lord, as if it had been

master

master of that house; he cast out all the idolatrous altars that were in the mount of the house and in Jerusalem, as detestable things; now (we hope) he loathed them as much as ever he had loved them, and said to them, *get ye hence*, Isa. xxx. 22. *what have I to do any more with idols?* I have had enough of them. (2.) He returned to his duty, for he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had either been abused and broken down by some of the idolatrous priests, or at least neglected or gone out of repair. He sacrificed thereon peace-offerings to implore God's favour, and thank-offerings to praise him for his deliverance. Nay, he now used his power to reform his people, as before he had abused it to corrupt them, he commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. Note, Those that truly repent of their sins will not only return to God themselves, but will do all they can to reduce those that have by their example been seduced, and drawn away from God; else we do not thoroughly (as we ought) undo what we have done amiss, nor make the plaster as wide as the wound. And we find he prevailed to bring them off from their false Gods, but not from their high places, ver. 17. they still sacrificed in them, yet to the Lord their God only: Manasseh could not carry the reformation so far as he had carried the corruption. It is an easy thing to debase men's manners, but not so easy to reform them again.

5. His prosperity in some measure, after his repentance. He might plainly see it was sin that ruined him; for when he returned to God in a way of duty, God returned to him in a way of mercy: And then he built a wall about the city of David, ver. 14: for by sin he had unwall'd it, and exposed it to the enemy. He also put captains of war in the fenced cities, for the security of his country. Josephus saith, That all the rest of his time he was so changed for the better, that he was looked upon as a very happy man.

Lastly, Here is the conclusion of his history. The heads of those things, for a full narrative of which we are referred to the other writings that were then extant, are more than of any of the kings, ver. 18, 19. A particular account it seems was kept, (1.) Of all his sin, and his trespasses, the high places he built, the groves and images he set up, before he was humbled. Probably, this was taken from his own confession which he made of his sin, when God gave him repentance, and which he left upon record, and was inserted in a book, entitled, *The words of their seers*: those seers that spoke to him, ver. 13. to reprove him for his sin; he sent his confession to when he repented, to be inserted in their memoirs, as a token of his gratitude to them for their kindness in reproving him. Thus it becomes penitents to take shame to themselves, to give thanks to their reprovers, and warning to others. (2.) Of the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the Lord, (ver. 10.) the reproofs they gave him for his sins and their exhortations to repentance. Note, Sinners ought to consider that how little notice soever they take of them, an account is kept of the words of the seers that spake to them from God, to admonish them of their sins, warn them of their danger, and call them to their duty, which will be produced against them in the great day. (3.) Of his prayer to God, (that is twice mentioned, as a remarkable thing) and how God was intreated of him. This was written for the generations to come, that the people that should be created might praise the Lord, for his readiness to receive returning prodigals.

Notice is taken of the place of his burial, not in the sepulchres of the kings, but in his own house; he was buried privately, and nothing of that honour was done him at his death that was done to his father. Penitents may recover their comfort sooner than their credit.

21. ¶ Amon was two and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22. But he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as did Manasseh his father: for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images, which Manasseh his father had made, and served them; 23. And humbled not himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more. 24. And his servants conspired against him, and slew him in his own house. 25. ¶ But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

We have little recorded concerning Amon, but enough unless it were better. Here is,

1. His great wickedness. He did as Manasseh had done in the days of his apostasy, ver. 22. They who think this an evidence that Manasseh did not truly repent, forget how many good kings had wicked sons. Only it should seem Manasseh was in this defective, that when he cast out the images, he did not utterly deface and destroy them according to the law, which required them to burn the images with fire, Deut. vii. 5. How necessary that law was, this instance shews; for the carved images being only thrown by and not burnt, Amon knew where to find them, soon set them up, and sacrificed to them. It is added, to represent him exceeding sinful, and to justify God in cutting him off so soon, (1.) That he out-did his father in sinning: *He trespassed more and more*, ver. 23. His father did ill, but he did worse. They that were joined to idols grew more and more mad upon them. (2.) That he came short of his father in repenting, he humbled not himself before the Lord, as his father had humbled himself. He fell like him, but did not get up again like him. It is not so much sin, as impenitence in sin that ruins men; not so much that they offend; as that they do not humble themselves for their offences; not the disease, but the neglect of the remedy.

2. His speedy destruction. He reigned but two years, and then his servants conspired against him and slew him, ver. 24. Perhaps when Amon sinned as his father did in the beginning of his days; he promised himself that he should repent as his father did in the latter end of his days: But his case shews what a madness it is to presume upon that; if he hoped to repent when he was old, he was wretchedly disappointed; for he was cut off when he was young. He rebelled against God, and his own servants rebelled against him. Herein God was righteous, but they were wicked, and justly did the people of the land put them to death as traitors. The lives of kings are particularly under the protection of providence, and the laws both of God and man.

C H A P. XXXIV.

Before we see Judah and Jerusalem ruined we shall yet see some glorious years, while good Josiah sits at the helm. By his pious endeavours for reformation God tried them yet once more; if they had known in

this their day, the day of their visitation, the things that belonged to their peace and improved them, their ruin might have been prevented. But after this reign they were hid from their eyes, and the next reigns brought an utter desolation upon them. In this chapter we have, (1.) A general account of Josiah's character, ver. 1, 2. (2.) His zeal to root out idolatry, ver. 3—7. (3.) His care to repair the temple, ver. 8—13. (4.) The finding of the book of the law, and the good use made of it, ver. 14—28. (5.) The public reading of the law to the people, and their renewing the covenant with God thereupon, ver. 29—33. Much of this we had, 2 Kings xxi.

1. JOSIAH was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem one and thirty years. 2. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand nor to the left. 3. ¶ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. 4. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images that were on high above them he cut down, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. 5. And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. 6. And so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their mattocks round about. 7. And when he had broken down the altars and the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem.

Concerning Josiah we are told,

1. That he came to the crown when he was very young, but eight years old; yet his infancy did not debar him from his right, and reigned thirty-one years, ver. 1. a considerable time; but I doubt in the beginning of his reign things went much as they had done in his father's time, because being a child he must leave the management of them to others; so that it was not till his twelfth year, which goes far in the number of his years, that the reformation began, ver. 3. he could not, as Hezekiah did, fall about it immediately.

2. That he reigned very well, ver. 2. approved himself to God, and trod in the steps of David, and did not decline either to the right hand or to the left; for there are errors on both hands.

3. That while he was young, about sixteen years old, he began to seek after God, ver. 3. We have reason to think he had not had so good an education, as Manasseh had; it is well if those about him did not endeavour to corrupt and debase him; yet he thus sought God when he was young. It is the duty and interest of young people, and will particularly be the honour of young gentlemen, as soon as they come to years of understanding, to begin to seek God; for they that seek him early shall find him.

4. That in his twelfth year, when it is probable he took the administration of the government entirely into his own hands, he began to purge his kingdom from the remains of idolatry: he destroyed the high places, groves, images, altars, all the utensils of idolatry, ver. 3, 4. He not only cast them out as Manasseh did, but broke them to pieces and made dust of them. This destruction of idolatry is here said to be in his twelfth year, but it was said, 2 Kings xxiii. 23. to be in his eighteenth year; something was done towards it now in his twelfth year; then he began to purge out idolatry, but probably that good work met with opposition, so that it was not thoroughly done till they had found the book of the law six years after; but here the whole work is laid together briefly, which was much more largely and particularly related in the Kings. His zeal carried him out to do this not only in Judah and Jerusalem, but in the cities of Israel too, as far as he had any influence upon them.

8. ¶ Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land, and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of the LORD his God. 9. And when they came to Hilkiah the high-priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites that kept the doors, had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin, and they returned to Jerusalem. 10. And they put it in the hand of the workmen, that had the oversight of the house of the LORD, and they gave it to the workmen that wrought in the house of the LORD, to repair and mend the house. 11. Even to the artificers and builders gave they it, to buy hewn stone, and timber for couplings, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed. 12. And the men did the work faithfully: and the overseers of them were Jahath, and Obadiah, the Levites of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah, and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; and others of the Levites, all that could skill of instruments of music. 13. Also they were over the bearers of burdens, and were overseers of all that wrought the work in any manner of service; and of the Levites, there were scribes, and officers, and porters.

Here,

Here, 1. Orders are given by the king, for the repair of the temple, *ver.* 8. when he had purged the house of the corruptions of it, he began to fit it up for the services that were to be performed in it. Thus we must do by the spiritual temple of the heart; get it cleansed from the pollutions of sin, and then renewed, so as to be transformed into the image of God. Jotham in this order calls God the Lord his God; they that truly love God will *love the habitation of his house.*

2. Care is here taken about it; effectual care; the Levites went about the country and gathered money towards it, which was returned to the three trustees mentioned, *ver.* 8. they brought it to Hilkiah the high priest, *ver.* 9. and he and they put it into the hands of workmen, both overseers and labourers, who undertook to do it by the great, as we say, or *in the gross*, *ver.* 10, 11. It is observed that the workmen were industrious and honest, they *did the work faithfully*, *ver.* 12. and workmen are not completely faithful if they are not both careful and diligent, for a confidence is reposed in them that they will be so. Also that the overseers were ingenious; for it is said all those were employed to inspect this work that could skill of instruments of music: not that their skill in music would be of any use in architecture, but it was an evidence that they were men of sense and ingenuity, and particularly that their genius lay towards the mathematics, which qualified them very much for this trust. Witty men are then wise men when they employ their wit in doing good, in helping their friends, and as they have opportunity of serving the public. Observe in this work how God dispenseth his gifts variously; here were some that were *bearers of burdens*, cut out for bodily labour, and fit to work. Here were others (*made meliorati*) that had skill in music, and they were *overseers of them that laboured*, and scribes and officers; the former were the hands, these were the heads, they had need of one another, and the work needeth both. Let not the overseers of the work despise the bearers of burdens, nor let them that work in the service grudge at those whose office is to direct, but let each esteem and serve the other in love, and God have the glory, and the church the benefit of the different gifts and dispositions of both.

14. ¶ And when they brought out the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of the LORD *given by Moses.* 15. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan: 16. And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do it. 17. And they have gathered together the money *that was* found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. 18. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. 19. And it came to pass when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. 20. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Afsiah a servant of the king's, saying, 21. Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel, and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all *that is* written in this book. 22. And Hilkiah, and they that the king *had appointed*, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, the son of Tikvath the son of Hafroh, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem, in the college) and they spake to her to that effect. 23. ¶ And she answered them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell ye the man that sent you to me. 24. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, *even* all the curses *that are* written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah; 25. Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. 26. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall ye say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard. 27. Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard *thee* also, saith the LORD. 28. Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.

This whole paragraph we had just as it is here related, 2 Kings xxii. 8—20. and have nothing to add here to what was there observed.

But, 1. We may from hence take occasion to bless God that we have plenty of Bibles, and they are or may be in all hands; that the book of the law and gospel is not lost, is not scarce; that in this sense the word of the Lord is not precious. Bibles are jewels, but thanks be to God they are not rarities: the fountain of the waters of life is not a spring shut up, or a fountain sealed, but the streams of it in all places *make glad the city of our*

No. LXV.

God: *Ufus communis aquarium.* What a great deal shall we have to answer for if the great things of God's law being thus made common, should be accounted by us as strange things?

2. We may from hence learn whenever we read or hear the word of God to affect our hearts with it, and to get them possessed with a holy fear of that wrath of God which is there revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, as Jotham's tender heart was. When he heard the words of the law, he *rent his clothes*, *ver.* 19. and God was greatly well pleased with his doing so, *ver.* 27. Were the things contained in the scripture new to us, as they were here to Jotham, surely they would make deeper impressions upon us than commonly they do; but they are never the less weighty, and therefore should not be the less considered by us for their being well-known. Rent the heart therefore, not the garments.

3. We are here directed when we are under convictions of sin, and apprehensions of divine wrath, to enquire of the Lord: as Jotham did, *ver.* 21. It concerns us to ask as they did, *Acts* ii. 37. *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* and more particularly as the jailor, saying, *What must I do to be saved?* *Acts* xvi. 30. *If ye will thus enquire, enquire ye,* *Ilu.* xxi. 12. And blessed be God we have the lively Oracles to which we apply ourselves with these enquiries.

4. We are here warned of the ruin that sin brings upon nations and kingdoms. They that forsake God bring evil upon themselves, *ver.* 24, 25. and kindle a fire *which shall not be quenched*; such will the fire of God's wrath be, when the decree is gone forth against those that obstinately and impenitently persist in their wicked ways.

5. We are here encouraged to humble ourselves before God, and seek unto him, as Jotham did: if we cannot prevail thereby to turn away God's wrath from our land, yet we shall deliver our own souls, *ver.* 27, 28. And good people are here taught to be so far from fearing death, as to welcome it rather when it *takes them away from the evil to come.* See how the property of it is altered by making it the matter of a promise: *Thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace*; housed in that ark, as Noah, when a deluge is coming.

29. ¶ Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant, *that was* found in the house of the LORD. 31. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant *which are* written in this book. 32. And he caused all *that were* present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand *to it.* And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33. And Jotham took away all the abominations out of all the countries that *pertained* to the children of Israel, and made all *that were* present in Israel to serve, *even* to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their fathers.

We have here an account of the farther advances which Jotham made towards the reformation of his kingdom, upon the hearing of the law read, and the receipt of the message God sent him by the prophets. Happy the people that had such a king; for here we find,

1. That they were well taught. He did not go about to force them to their duty, till he had first instructed them in it. He called all the people together great and small, young and old, rich and poor, high and low; *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear* the words of the book of the covenant; for they are all concerned in those words; To put an honour upon the service, and to engage attention the more, though there were priests and Levites present, the king himself read the book to the people, *ver.* 30. and he read it no doubt in such a manner as to shew that he was himself affected with it, which would be a means to affect the hearers.

2. That they were well fixed. The articles of agreement between God and Israel being read, that they might intelligently covenant with God, both king and people here with great solemnity do as it were subscribe the articles; The king in his place covenanted to keep God's commandments with all his heart and soul, according to what was *written in the book*, *ver.* 31. and urged the people to declare their consent likewise to this covenant, and solemnly to promise, that they would faithfully perform, fulfil, and keep all and every thing that was on their part to be done, according to this covenant: Which they did; they could not for a shame do otherwise. He caused *all that were* present to stand *to it*, *ver.* 32. and made them all *to serve*, *even to serve the Lord their God*, *ver.* 33. To do it, and to make a business of it; he did all he could to bring them to it; to serve, even to serve; the repetition notes, that that was the only thing his heart was on; he aimed at nothing else in what he did, but to engage them to God and their duty.

3. That they were well tended; were honest with good looking to. *All his days they departed not from following the Lord*; he kept them with much ado from running into idolatry again: *All his days*, were days of restraint upon them; but this intimated, that there was in them a *bent to backslide*, a strong inclination to idolatry; many of them wanted nothing but to have him out of the way, and then they would have their high-places and their images up again. And therefore we find, that *in the days of Jotham*, *Jer.* iii. 6. God charged it upon treacherous Judah, that *he had not returned to him with all their heart, but feignedly*, *ver.* 10. nay, *had played the harlot*, *ver.* 8. and thereby had even *justified backsliding Israel*, *ver.* 11. And in the twenty-third year of this reign, four or five years after this, that they had *gone out to provoke God to anger with the works of their hands*, *Jer.* xxv. 3—7. And, which is very observable, it is from the beginning of Jotham's reformation, his twelfth or thirteenth year, that *the iniquity of the house of Judah*, which brought ruin upon them, and which the prophet was to bear lying on his right side, was dated, *Ezek.* iv. 6. For from thence to the destruction of Jerusalem was just forty years. Jotham was sincere in what he did, but the generality of the people were averse to it, and hankered after their idols still, so that the reformation, though well designed, and well prosecuted by the prince, had little or no effect upon the people. It was with reluctance that they parted with their idols; still they were in heart joined to them

them and wished for them again; this God saw, and therefore from that time; when one would have thought the foundations had been laid for a perpetual security and peace, I say, from that very time did the decree go forth for their destruction. Nothing hastens the ruin of a people, nor ripens them for it more, than the basing of hopeful attempts for reformation, and an hypocritical return to God. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.*

C H A P. XXXV.

We are here to attend Josiah, (1.) To the temple, where we see his religious care for the due observance of the ordinance of the passover, according to the law, ver. 1—19. (2.) To the field of battle, where we see his rashness, in engaging with the king of Egypt, and how dear it cost him, ver. 20—23. (3.) To the grave, where we see him bitterly lamented, ver. 24—27. And so we must take our leave of Josiah.

1. **MOREOVER**, Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 2. And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD. 3. And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; *it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel.* 4. And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son. 5. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people; and *after* the division of the families of the Levites. 6. So kill the passover and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that *they* may do according to the word of the LORD, by the hand of Moses. 7. And Josiah gave to the people, of the flock, lambs and kids, all for the passover-offerings, for all *that were* present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bullocks: *these were* of the king's substance. 8. And his princes gave willingly unto the people, to the priests and to the Levites: Hilkiah and Zechariah, and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave unto the priests for the passover-offerings, two thousand and six hundred *small cattle*, and three hundred oxen. 9. Conaniah also, and Shemaiah, and Nathaneel, his brethren, and Mahabiah, and Jehiel, and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave unto the Levites for passover-offerings, five thousand *small cattle*, and five hundred oxen. 10. So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king's commandment. 11. And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood from their hands, and the Levites slayed them. 12. And they removed the burnt-offerings, that they might give according to the divisions of the families of the people, to offer unto the LORD as *it is* written in the book of Moses: and so *did they* with the oxen. 13. And they roasted the passover with fire, according to the ordinance: but the *other* holy offerings sod they in pots, and in cauldrons, and in pans, and divided them speedily among all the people. 14. And afterward they made ready for themselves, and for the priests, because the priests the sons of Aaron were busied in offering of burnt-offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests the sons of Aaron. 15. And the singers the sons of Asaph, were in their place, according to the commandment of David and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. 16. So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah. 17. And the children of Israel *that were* present, kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. 18. And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel, from the days of Samuel the prophet, neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel *that were* present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.

The destruction which Josiah made of idols and idolatry was more largely related in the Kings, and but just mentioned here in the foregoing chapter; ver. 23. But his solemnizing of the passover, which was but touched upon there, 2 Kings xxiii. 21. is very particularly related here. Many were the feasts of the Lord, appointed by the ceremonial law, but the passover was the chief; it began them all in the night that Israel came out of Egypt. It

concluded them all in the night wherein Christ was betrayed and in the celebration of it Hezekiah and Josiah, these two great reformers, revived religion in their day. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is now nearest akin to that of any of the Jewish festivals; and the due observance of that ordinance, according to the rule, is an instance and means both of the growing purity and beauty of churches, and of the growing piety and devotion of particular Christians. Religion cannot flourish where that passover is either wholly neglected or not duly observed; return to that, revive that, make a solemn business of that affecting binding ordinance, and then, it is to be hoped, there will be a reformation in other instances also.

In the account we had of Hezekiah's passover, the great zeal of the people was observable, and the transport of devout affection that they were in; but little of that appears here. It was more in compliance with the king that they all kept the passover, ver. 17, 18. than from any great inclination they had to it themselves. Some pride they took in this form of godliness, but little pleasure in the power of it. But whatever defect there was among the people in the inside of their duty, both the magistrates and the ministers did their part, and took care that the external part of the service should be performed with a due decorum.

1. The king exhorted and directed, quickened and encouraged the priests and Levites to do their office in this solemnity. Perhaps he saw them remiss and indifferent, unwilling to go out of their road, or mend their pace; if ministers are so, it is not amiss for any, but most proper for magistrates to stir them up to their business. Say to Archippus, *Take heed to thy ministry.* Col. iv. 17. Let us see how this good king managed his clergy upon this occasion.

1. He reduced them to the office they were appointed to by the law of Moses, ver. 6. and the order they were put into by David and Solomon, ver. 4. He set them in their charge, ver. 2. did not ent them out new work, nor put them into any new method, but called them back to their institution. Their courses were settled in writing, let them have recourse to that writing, and marshal themselves according to the divisions of their families, ver. 5. Our rule is settled in the written word; let magistrates take care that ministers walk according to that rule, and they do their duty.

2. He ordered the ark to be put in its place, which it should seem had of late been misplaced, either by the wicked kings, to make room for their idols in the most holy place, or by Hezekiah to make room for the workmen that repaired the temple; however it was, Josiah bids the Levites put the holy ark in the house, ver. 3. and not carry it about from place to place, as perhaps of late they had done, justifying themselves therein by the practice before the temple was built. Now the priests were discharged from this burden of the ark, they must be careful in other services about it.

3. He charged them to serve God and his people Israel, ver. 3. Ministers must look upon themselves as servants both to Christ and to his church for his sake, 2 Cor. iv. 5. They must take care, and take pains, and lay out themselves to the utmost, (1.) For the glory and honour of God, and to advance the interests of his kingdom among men. Paul, a servant of God, Tit. i. 1. (2.) For the welfare and benefit of his people, not as having dominion over their faith, but as servants of their holiness and joy; and it will be no difficulty in the strength of God honestly to serve these two masters.

4. He charged them to sanctify themselves, and prepare their brethren, ver. 6. Ministers work must begin at home, and they must sanctify themselves in the first place, purely themselves from sin, sequester themselves from the world, and devote themselves to God, but it must not end there, they must do what they can to prepare their brethren by admonishing, instructing, exhorting, quickening, and comforting them. The preparation of the heart is indeed from the Lord; but ministers must be instruments in his hand.

5. He encouraged them to the service, ver. 2. He spoke comfortably to them, as Hezekiah did, chap. xxx. 22. He promised them his countenance. Note, Those whom we charge, we should encourage. Most people love to be spoken fair, and will be wrought upon by encouragement more than by threats.

2. The king and the princes, influenced by his example, gave liberally for the bearing of the charges of this passover. The ceremonial services were expensive, which perhaps was one reason why they had been neglected. People had not zeal enough to be at the charge of them; nor were they now very fond of them for that reason. And therefore,

(1.) Josiah at his own proper cost, furnished the congregation with paschal lambs, and other sacrifices to be offered during the seven days of the feast. He allowed out of his own estate, thirty thousand lambs, for passover offerings, which the offerers were to feast upon, and three thousand bullocks, ver. 7. to be offered during the following seven days. Note, Those who are serious in religion, when they persuade others to that which is good, should make it as cheap and easy to them as may be. And where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly; it is to be feared the congregation generally had not come provided; so that if Josiah had not furnished them, the work of God must have stood still.

(2.) The chief of the priests that were men of great estates, contributed towards the priests charges, as Josiah towards the peoples. The princes, ver. 8. i. e. the chief of the priests, the princes of the holy tribe; rulers of the house of God, bore the priests charges. And some of the rich and great men of the Levites, furnished them also with cattle both great and small for offerings, ver. 9. Those that sincerely desire to be found in the way of their duty, sometime providence raiseth them up friends to bear them out in it, beyond what they could have expected.

3. The priests and the Levites performed their office very readily, ver. 10. They killed the paschal lambs in the court of the temple, the priests sprinkled blood upon the altar, the Levites slayed them, and then gave the flesh to the people according to their families, ver. 11, 12. not fewer than ten, nor more than twenty, to a lamb; they took it to their several apartments, roasted it and eat it according to the ordinance, ver. 13. As for the other sacrifices they were eucharistical, the flesh of them was boiled according to the law of the peace-offerings, and was divided speedily among the people, that they might feast upon it as a token of their joy in the atonement made, and their reconciliation to God thereby. And lastly, the priests and Levites took care to honour God by eating of the passover themselves, ver. 14. Let not ministers think that the care they take for the souls of others, will excuse their neglect of their own; or that being employed so much in public worship will supersede the religious exercises of their closets and families: The Levites here made ready for themselves and for the priests, because the priests were wholly taken up all day in the service of the altar, therefore that they might not have their lamb to dress when they should eat it, the Levites got it ready for them against supper time. Let ministers learn hence to help one another, and to forward one another's work, as brethren, and fellow-servants of the same master.

5. The singers and porters attended in their places, and did their office, ver. 15. The singers with their sacred songs and music expressed and excited the joy of the congregation, and made the service very pleasant to them; and the porters at the gates took care that there should be no breaking in of any thing, to desile or disquiet the assembly, not going out of any from

from it, that none should steal away till the service was done: And while they were thus employed, their brethren the Levites prepared paschal lambs for them.

5. The whole solemnity was performed with great exactness according to the law, *ver. 16, 17.* and upon that account there was none like it since Samuel's time, *ver. 18.* for in Hezekiah's passover there were several irregularities. And Bishop Patrick observes, that in this also it exceeded the other passovers which preceding kings had kept; that though Josiah was nothing so rich as David and Solomon, and Jehoshaphat, yet he furnished the whole congregation with beasts for sacrifice, both paschal and eucharistical, at his own proper cost and charge, which was more than any king ever did before him.

20. ¶ After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Charchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. 21. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste, forbear thee from meddling with God who is with me, that he destroy thee not. 22. Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. 23. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away, for I am fore wounded. 24. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers: and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah. 25. ¶ And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and all the singing-men, and the singing-women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and behold, they are written in the lamentations. 26. Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his goodness according to that which was written in the law of the LORD. 27. And his deeds first and last, behold they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

It was thirteen years from Josiah's famous passover to his death; during which time we may hope things went well in his kingdom; that he prospered, and religion flourished; yet we are not entertained with the pleasing account of those years, but they are passed over in silence, because the people for all this were not turned from the love of their sins, nor God from the fierceness of his anger: The next news we hear therefore of Josiah, is, that he is cut off in the midst of his days and usefulness, before he is full forty years old. We had this sad story, 2 Kings xxiii. 29, 30. here it is somewhat more largely related; That appears here more than it did there, which reflects with such blame on Josiah, and such praise on the people as one would not have expected.

1. Josiah was a very good prince, yet he is much to be blamed for his rashness and presumption in going out to war against the king of Egypt without cause or call. It was bad enough as it appeared in the *Kings*, that he meddled with strife which belonged not to him. But here it looks worse; for it seems the king of Egypt sent ambassadors to him to warn him against this enterprise, *ver. 21.* He argues, (1.) From principles of justice: The king of Egypt professeth he had no design to do him any hurt, and therefore it was unfair, against common equity and the law of nations, for Josiah to take up arms against him. If even a righteous man engage in an *unrighteous cause*, let him not expect to prosper, *God is no respecter of persons.* See *Prov. iii. 20. xxv. 8.* (2.) From principles of religion. *God is with me*, nay, *He commanded me to make haste*, and therefore if thou retard my motions, thou meddlest with God. It cannot be that the king of Egypt only pretended this, as Sennacherib did in a like case, 2 Kings xviii. 25. hoping thereby to make Josiah desist, because he knew he had a veneration for the word of God; for it is said here, *ver. 22.* That the words of Necho were *from the mouth of God*; we must therefore suppose that either by a dream, or by a strong impulse upon his spirit, which he had reason to think was from God, or by Jeremiah, or some other prophet, he had ordered him to make war upon the king of Assyria. (3.) From principles of policy. *That he destroy thee not*; it is at thy peril, if thou engage against one that has both a better army, and a better cause, and God on his side.

It was not wrath to Josiah, whose heart was upright with the Lord his God, but in wrath to any hypocritical nation, who were unworthy of so good a king, that he was so far infatuated as not to hearken to those fair reasonings, and desist from his enterprise. He would not turn his face from him, but went in person and fought the Egyptian army in the valley of Megiddo, *ver. 22.* If perhaps he could not believe that the king of Egypt had a command from God to do what he did, yet upon his pleading such a command, he ought to have consulted the oracles of God before he had gone out against him. His not doing that was a great fault, and of a fatal consequence. In this matter he walked not in the ways of David his father, for had it been his case, he would have enquired of the Lord, *Shall I go up? Wilt thou deliver them into my hands?* How can we think to prosper in our ways, if we do not acknowledge God in them?

2. The people were a very wicked people, yet they are much to be praised for lamenting the death of Josiah as they did. That Jeremiah lamented him, I do not wonder, he was the weeping prophet, and plainly foresaw the utter ruin of his country following up the death of his good king. But it is strange to find that all Judah and Jerusalem, that stupid senseless people, mourned for him, *ver. 24.* contrived how to have their mourning excited by singing-men and singing-women; how to have it spread through the kingdom; they made an ordinance in Israel, that the mournful ditties penned on this sad occasion, should be learned and sung by all sorts of people. And lastly, how to have the remembrance of it perpetuated; the elegies were inserted in the collection of State-Poems, they are written in the Lamentations. Hereby it appeared, (1.) That they had some respect to their good prince, and though they did not cordially comply with him in all his good designs, yet they could not but have a great honour for him. Pious useful men will be manifested in the consciences even of those that will not

be influenced by their example; and many that will not submit to the use of serious godliness themselves, yet cannot but give it their good word, and esteem it in others. Perhaps those lamented Josiah when he was dead that were not thankful to God for him while he lived. The Israelites murmured to Moses and Aaron while they were with them, and spoke sometimes of stoning them, and yet when they died they mourned for them many days: We are often taught to value mercies by the loss of them, which when we enjoyed we did not prize as we ought. (2.) That they had some sense of their own danger, now he was gone. Jeremiah told them, it is likely, of the evil they must now expect would come upon them, from which he was taken away; and so far they credited what he said, that they lamented the death of him that was their defence. Note, Many will easier be persuaded to lament the miseries that are coming upon them, than to take the proper way by universal reformation to prevent them; will shed tears for their troubles, but will not be prevailed upon to part with their sins. But godly sorrow worketh repentance, and that repentance will be to salvation.

C H A P. XXXVI.

We have here, 1. A short but sad account of the utter ruin of Judah and Jerusalem, within a few years after Josiah's death. (1.) The history of it in the unhappy reigns of Jehoahaz for three months, *ver. 1—4.* Jehoiakim, *ver. 5—8.* for eleven years, Jehoiachin three months, *ver. 9, 10.* and Zedekiah eleven years, *ver. 11.* Additions were made to the national guilt, and advances towards the national destruction in each of those reigns; which at length was completed in the slaughter of multitudes, *ver. 17.* the plundering and burning of the temple and all the palaces, the desolation of the city, *ver. 18, 19.* And the captivity of the people that remained, *ver. 20.* (2.) Some remarks upon it; that herein sin was punished. Zedekiah's wickedness, *ver. 12, 13.* The idolatry the people were guilty of, *ver. 14.* and abuse of God's prophets, *ver. 15, 16.* The word of God was herein fulfilled, *ver. 21.* 2. The dawning of the day of their deliverance in Cyrus's proclamation, *ver. 22, 23.*

1. THEN the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's stead in Jerusalem. 2. Jehoahaz was twenty and three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. 3. And the king of Egypt put him down at Jerusalem, and condemned the land in an hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. 4. And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and turned his name to Jehoiakim, and Necho took Jehoahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt. 5. ¶ Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. 6. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon. 7. Nebuchadnezzar also carried off the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon. 8. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. 9. ¶ Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD. 10. And when the year was expired king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the goodly vessels of the house of the LORD, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.

The destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is here coming on by degrees: God so ordered it to shew that he has no pleasure in sinners ruin, but had rather they would turn and live, and therefore gives them both time and inducement to repent, and waits to be gracious. The history of these reigns was more largely recorded in the three last chapters of the second of Kings.

1. Jehoahaz was set up by the people, *ver. 1.* but in one quarter of a year was deposed by Pharaoh-necho, and carried a prisoner to Egypt, and the land sinned for setting him up, *ver. 2, 3, 4.* Of this young prince we hear no more; had he trod in the steps of his father's piety, he might have reigned long and prospered, but we are told in the *Kings* that he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and therefore his triumphing was short, and his joy but for a moment.

2. Jehoiakim was set up by the king of Egypt, and reigned eleven years. How low was Judah brought when the king of Egypt, an old enemy of their land, gave what king he pleased to the kingdom, and what name he pleased to the king, *ver. 4.* He made Eliakim king, and called him Jehoiakim in token of his authority over him. He did that which was evil, *ver. 5.* nay, we read of the abominations which he did, *ver. 8.* he was very vile and wicked; idolatries generally go under the name of abominations. We hear no more of the king of Egypt, but the king of Babylon came up against him, *ver. 7.* seized him, and bound him with a design to carry him to Babylon; but it seems he either changed his mind and suffered him to reign as his vassal, or death released the prisoner before he was carried away. However the best and most valuable vessels of the temple were now carried away, and made use of in Nebuchadnezzar's temple in Babylon, *ver. 6.* for we may suppose no temple in the world was so richly furnished as that of Jerusalem. The sin of Judah was, that they had brought the idols of the heathen into God's temple: and now their punishment was, that the vessels of the temple were carried away unto the service of the gods of the nations. If men will profane God's institutions by their sins, it is just with God to suffer them to be profaned by their enemies. These were the vessels which the false prophets flattered the people with hopes of the return of, *Jer. xxvii. 16.* but Jeremiah told them, the rest should go after them, *ver. 22.* and they did so. But as the carrying away of these vessels to Babylon

Babylon began the calamity of Jerusalem, so Belshazzar's daring profanation of them there filled the measure of the iniquity of Babylon; for when he drank wine in them to the honour of his gods, the hand-writing on the wall presented him with his doom, *Dan. v. 3.* In the reference to the book of the *Kings* concerning this Jehoiakim mention is made of *that which was found in him*, ver. 8. which seems to be meant of the treachery that was found in him towards the king of Babylon: but some of the Jewish writers understand it of certain private marks or signatures found in his dead body in honour of his idol; such cuttings as God had forbidden, *Lev. xix. 28.*

3. Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, attempted to reign in his stead, and reigned long enough to shew his evil inclination; but after three months and ten days the king of Babylon sent and fetched him away captive, with more of the goodly vessels of the temple. He is here said to be eight years old, but in *Kings* he is said to be eighteen when he began to reign, so that this seems to be a mistake of the transcriber, unless we suppose that his father took him at eight years old to join with him in the government, as some think.

11. ¶ *Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.* 12. And he did *that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the LORD.* 13. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God, but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. 14. ¶ Moreover, all the chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. 15. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: 16. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. 17. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword, in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. 18. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. 19. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the places thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20. And them that had escaped from the sword, carried he away to Babylon: where they were servants to him and his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21. To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate, she kept her sabbaths, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

We have here an account of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. Abraham, God's friend, was called out of that country, from Ur of the Chaldees, when God took him into covenant and communion with himself, and now his degenerate seed were carried into that country again, to signify that they had forfeited all that kindness wherewith they had been loved for the father's sake, and the benefit of the covenant into which he was called; all was now undone again.

Here is, 1. The sins that brought this desolation.

(1.) Zedekiah, the king in whose days it came, brought it upon himself by his own folly. For he carried himself very ill both towards God and towards the king of Babylon. 1. If he had but made God his friend that would have prevented the ruin. Jeremiah brought him messages from God, which if he had given due regard to, it might have been a lengthening of his tranquillity; but it is here charged upon him, that he *humbled not himself before Jeremiah*, ver. 12. It was expected that this mighty prince, as big as he was, should humble himself before a poor prophet, when he *spoke from the mouth of the Lord*, should submit to his admonitions, and be amended by them; to his counsels, and be ruled by them; should lay himself under the commanding power of the word of God in his mouth; and because he would not thus make himself a servant to God, he is made a slave to his enemies. They that will not humble themselves, God will find some way or other to humble them. Jeremiah as a prophet was set over the nations and kingdoms, *Jer. i. 10.* and as mean a figure as he made, whoever would not humble themselves before him it was at their peril. 2. If he had been but true to his covenant with the king of Babylon, that would have prevented his ruin; but he *rebelled against him*, though he had sworn to be his faithful tributary, and perfidiously violated his engagements to him, ver. 13. This was it that provoked the king of Babylon to deal so severely with him as he did. All nations looked upon an oath as a sacred thing, and those that durst break through the obligations of it as the worst of men, abandoned of God, and to be abhorred by all mankind: if therefore Zedekiah falsify his oath, when *lo, he has given his hand*, he *shall not escape*, *Ezek. xvii. 18.* Though Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen, an enemy, yet if having sworn to him, to be false to him, he shall know there is a God to whom vengeance belongs. The thing that ruined Zedekiah was not only that he turned not to the Lord God of Israel, but that he *stiffened his neck and hardened his heart from turning to him*, i. e. he was obstinately resolved not to return to him, would not lay his neck under God's yoke, nor his heart under the impressions of his words, and so in effect he would not be healed, he would not live.

(2.) The great sin that brought this destruction was idolatry; the priests and people went after the *abominations of the heathen*, forsook the pure worship of God for the lewd and filthy rites of the Pagan superstition, and so *polluted the house of the Lord*, ver. 14. The priests, the chief of the priests, that should have opposed idolatry, were ring-leaders in it. That place is not far from ruin, in which religion is already ruined.

(3.) The great aggravation of their sin, and that which filled the measure of it, was the abuse they gave to God's prophets, who were sent to call them to repentance, ver. 15, 16. Where we have,

1. God's tender compassion towards them in sending prophets to them. Because he was the *God of their fathers*, in covenant with them, and whom they worshipped; though this degenerate race forsook him, therefore he sent to them by his messengers, to convince them of their sin, and to warn them of the ruin they would bring upon themselves by it; "rising up betimes and sending," which notes not only that he did it with the greatest care and concern imaginable, as men rise betimes to set their servants on work, when their heart is upon their business: but that upon their first deviation from God to idols, if they took but one step that way, God presently sent to them by his messengers to reprove them for it: he gave them early, timely notice both of their duty and danger. Let this quicken us to seek God early, that he riseth betimes to send to us. The prophets that were sent, rose betimes to speak to them, were diligent and faithful in their office, lost no time, slipped no opportunity of dealing with them, and therefore God is said to rise betimes. The more pains ministers take in their work, the more will the people have to answer for if it be all in vain. The reason given, why God by his prophets did thus strive with them, is, because *he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place*, and would by these means have prevented their ruin. Note, The methods God takes to reclaim sinners by his word, by ministers, by conscience, by providences, are all instances of his compassion towards them, and his unwillingness that any should perish.

2. Their base and disingenuous carriage towards God, ver. 16. *they mocked the messengers of God*, which was a high affront to him that sent them, despised his word in their mouths; and not only so, but mis-used the prophets, treating them as their enemies. The ill usage they gave Jeremiah, who lived at this time, and which we read much of in the book of his prophecy, is an instance of this. This was an evidence of an implacable enmity to God, and an invincible resolution to go on in their sins. This brought wrath upon them without remedy, for it was sinning against the remedy. Nothing is more provoking to God, than abuses given to his faithful ministers; for what is done against them, he takes as done against himself. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Persecution was the sin that brought upon Jerusalem its final destruction by the Romans. See *Matth. xxiii. 34—37.* Those that mock at God's faithful ministers, and do all they can to render them despicable or odious, that vex and mis-use them, to discourage them, and to keep others from hearkening to them, let them know that a wrong done to an ambassador is construed as done to the prince that sends them, and the day is coming, when they will find it had been better for them, they had been thrown into the sea with a mill-stone about their necks; for hell is deeper, and more dreadful.

3. The desolation itself, and some few of the particulars of it, which we had more largely, 2 *Kings xxv.*

1. Multitudes were put to the sword, even in the house of their sanctuary, ver. 17. whither they fled for refuge, hoping the holiness of the place would be their protection: but how could they expect to find it so, when they themselves had polluted it with their abominations? ver. 14. Those that cast off the dominion of their religion, forfeit all the benefit and comfort of it. The Chaldeans not only paid no reverence to the sanctuary, but shewed no natural pity either to the tender sex, or to the venerable aged. They forsook God, who had compassion on them, ver. 15. and would have none of him; justly therefore are they given up into the hands of cruel men, that had no compassion on young man or maiden.

2. All the remaining vessels of the temple, great and small, and all the treasures, sacred and secular, the treasures of God's house, and of the king and his princes, were seized and brought to Babylon, ver. 18.

3. The temple was burnt, the walls of Jerusalem demolished, the houses (called here the palaces, as *Psal. xlviii. 3.* so stately, rich and sumptuous were they) laid in ashes, and all the furniture called here, the *goodly vessels thereof*, destroyed, ver. 19. Let us see here what woeful havoc sin makes, and as we tender the comfort and continuance of our estates, keep that worm from the root of them.

4. The remainder of the people that escaped the sword were carried captives to Babylon, ver. 20. impoverished, enslaved, insulted and exposed to all the miseries, not only of a strange and barbarous land, but of an enemy's land, where those that hated them bore rule of them. They were servants to those monarchs, and no doubt were ruled with rigour as long as that monarchy lasted. Now they sat down by the rivers of Babylon, with the streams of which they mingled their tears, *Psal. cxxxvii. 1.* And though there it should seem they were cured of idolatry; yet, as appears by the prophet Ezekiel, they were not cured of mocking the prophets.

5. The land lay desolate while they were captives in Babylon, ver. 21. That fruitful land, the glory of all lands, was now turned into a desert, not tilled nor husbanded. The pastures not clothed as they used to be with flocks, nor the vallies with corn, but it lay neglected. Now this may be considered, (1.) As the just punishment of their former abuse of it. They had served Baal with its fruits, *curst is the ground for their sakes*: Now the land enjoyeth her sabbaths, ver. 21. as God had threatened by Moses, *Lev. xxvi. 34.* and the reason there given, ver. 35. is because *it did not rest on your sabbaths*, you profaned the sabbath-day, did not observe the sabbatical year. They many a time ploughed and sowed their land in the seventh year when it should have rested, and now it lay unploughed and unsown for ten times seven years. Note, God will be no loser in his glory at long run by the disobedience of men; if the tribute be not paid, he will distrain and recover it, as he speaks, *Hos. ii. 9.* If they would not let the land rest, God would make it rest whether they would or no. Some think they had neglected the observance of seventy sabbatical years in all, and just so many by way of reprisal the land now enjoyed; or if those neglected were fewer, it was fit the law should be satisfied with interest. We find one of the quarrels God had with them at this time was for not observing another law which related to the seventh year, and that was the release of servants, see *Jer. xxxiv. 13, &c.* (2.) Yet we may consider it as giving some encouragement to their hopes, that they should in due time return to it again. Had others come and taken possession of it, they might have despaired of ever recovering it; but while it lay desolate, it did as it were lie waiting for them again, and refuse to acknowledge any other owners.

22. ¶ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia (that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah, might be accomplished) the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 23. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me, and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem which is in Judah: who

who *is there* among you of all his people? the LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up.

These two last verses of this book have a double aspect.

1. They that look back to the prophecy of Jeremiah, and shew how that was accomplished, *ver. 22*. God had by him promised the restoring of the captives, and the re-building of Jerusalem at the end of seventy years, and that time to favour Sion, that set time came at last. After a long and dark night, the day spring from on high visited them. God will be found true to every word he has spoken.

2. They looked forward to the history of Ezra, which begins with repetition of these two last verses. They are there the introduction to a pleasant story, here they are the conclusion of a very melancholy one; and so we learn from them, that though God's church be cast down, it is not cast off; though his people be corrected, they are not abandoned; though thrown into the furnace, yet not lost there, nor left there any longer than till the dross be separated. Though God contend long, he will not contend always. The Israel of God shall be fetched out of Babylon in due time, and even the dry bones made to live. It may be long first; but the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak and not lie; therefore though it tarry, wait for it.

THE END OF THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

AN E X P O S I T I O N, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

Of the BOOK of

E Z R A.

The Jewish church puts on quite another face in this book, from what it had appeared with; its state much better and more pleasant than it was of late in Babylon, and yet far inferior to what it had been formerly. The dry bones here live again, but *in the form of a servant*: the yoke of their captivity is taken off, but the marks of it in their galled necks remain. Kings we hear no more of, *the crown is fallen from their heads*. Prophets they are blessed with to direct them in their re-establishment, but after a while prophecy ceased among them, till the great Prophet appears, and his fore-runner. The history of this book is the accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the Jews out of Babylon, at the end of seventy years, and a type of the accomplishment of the prophecies of the Apocalypse, concerning the deliverance of the gospel church out of the New Testament Babylon. Ezra preserved the records of that great revolution, and transmitted them to the church in this book. His name signifies a helper; and so he was to that people. A particular account concerning him we shall meet with, *chap. vii.* where he himself enters upon the stage of action. The book gives us an account, (1.) Of the Jews return out of their captivity, *chap. i. and ii.* (2.) Of the building of the temple, the opposition it met with, and yet the perfecting of it at last, *chap. iii.—vi.* Of Ezra's coming to Jerusalem, *chap. vii. and viii.* (4.) Of the good service he did there, in obliging those that had married strange wives to put them away, *chap. ix. and x.* This beginning again of the Jewish nation was small, yet its latter end greatly increased.

C H A P. I.

In this chapter we have, (1.) The proclamation which Cyrus, king of Persia, issued out for the release of all the Jews that he found captives in Babylon; and the building of their temple in Jerusalem, *ver. 1—4.* (2.) The return of many thereupon, *ver. 5—6.* (3.) Orders given for the restoring of the vessels of the temple, *ver. 7—11.* And this is the dawning of the day of their deliverance.

1. **N**OW in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, (that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled) the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 2. Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3. Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God *be* with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah; and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem. 4. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the free-will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

It will be proper for us here to consider,

1. What was the state of the captive Jews, in Babylon, it was upon many accounts very deplorable; they were under the power of those that hated them, had nothing they could call their own; they had no temple, no altar. If they sung psalms their enemies ridiculed them, and yet they had prophets among them. Ezekiel and Daniel were kept distinct from the heathen: some of them were preferred at court, others had comfortable settlements in the country, and they were all borne up with hope, that in due time they should return to their own land again, in expectation of which they preserved among them the distinction of their families, the knowledge of their religion, and an aversion to idolatry.

2. What was the state of the government under which they were. Nebuchadnezzar carried many of them into captivity, in the first year of his

reign, which was the fourth of Jehoiakim; he reigned forty-five years, his son Evil-merodach twenty-three, and his grandson Belshazzar three years, which make up the seventy years. So Dr. Lightfoot. It is charged upon Nebuchadnezzar, that he opened not the house of his prisoners, *Isa. xiv. 17.* And if he had shewed mercy to the poor Jews, Daniel told him, it would have been the lengthening of his tranquillity, *Dan. iv. 17.* But the measure of the sins of Babylon was at length full, and then destruction was brought upon them by Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, which we read of, *Dan. v.* Darius, being old, left the government to Cyrus, and he was employed as the instrument of the Jews deliverance, which he gave orders for as soon as ever he was master of the kingdom of Babylon, either in contradiction to Nebuchadnezzar, whose family he had cut off, and because he took a pleasure in undoing what he had done; or in policy to recommend his new acquired dominion as merciful and gentle, or, as some think, in a pious regard to the prophecy of Isaiah, which had been published, and well known above one hundred and fifty years before, where he was expressly named, as the man that should do this for God, and for whom God would do great things, *Isa. xlv. 23.—xlv. 1, &c.* and which perhaps was shewed him by those about him. His name some say in the Persian language signifies the sun, for he brought light and healing to the church of God; and was an eminent type of Christ the *sun of righteousness*. Some say his name signifies a father, and Christ is the everlasting father.

Now here we are told,

1. Whence this proclamation took its rise. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. Note, The hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord, and, like the rivulets of water, he turneth them which way soever he will. It is said of Cyrus, that he knew not God, nor how to serve him, but God knew him, and how to serve himself by him, *Isa. xlv. 4.* God governs the world by his influence on the spirits of men, and whatever good is done at any time it is God that stirs up the spirit to do it, puts thoughts into the mind, gives to the understanding to form a right judgment, and directs the will which way he pleaseth. Whatever good offices therefore are at any time done for the church of God, he must have the glory of them.

2. The reference it had to the prophecy of Jeremiah, by whom God had not only promised that they should return, but had fixed the time, which set time to favour Sion was now come. Seventy years were determined, *Jer. xxv. 12.—xxix. 10.* And he that kept the promise made concerning Israel's deliverance out of Egypt to a day, *Exod. xii. 41.* doubtless was as punctual to this. What Cyrus now did, was long since said to be the confirming of the word of God's servants, *Isa. xlv. 26.* Jeremiah, while he lived, was hated and despised, yet thus did providence honour him long after, that a mighty monarch shall act in pursuance of the word of the Lord by his mouth.

3. The date of this proclamation. It was in his first year, not the first of his reign over Persia, the kingdom he was born to, but the first of his reign over Babylon, the kingdom he had conquered. Those are much honoured whose spirits are stirred up to begin with God and to serve him in their first years.

4. The publication of it, both by word of mouth, he *caused a voice to pass throughout all his kingdom*, like a jubilee trumpet (a joyful sabbatical year after many melancholy ones) proclaiming liberty to the captives; and in black and white too, he put it in writing, that it might be the more satisfactory, and might be sent to those distant provinces where the ten tribes were scattered, in Assyria and Media, *2 Kings xvii. 6.*

5. The purport of this proclamation of liberty. 1. The preamble shews the causes and considerations of him thereunto moving, *ver. 2.* It should seem, his mind was enlightened with the knowledge of Jehovah, for so he calls him, the God of Israel, as the only *living and true God*, the God of heaven, who is the sovereign Lord and disposer of all the kingdoms of the earth; of him he saith, *ver. 3. He is the God*, God alone, God above all though he had not known God by education, God made him so far to know him now, as that he did this service with an eye to him. He professed that he doth it, (1.) In gratitude to God for the favours he had bestowed upon him. *The God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth.* This sounds a little vain-glorious, for there were many kingdoms of the earth which he had nothing to do with; but he means, that God had given him all that was given to Nebuchadnezzar, whose dominion, Daniel saith, was to the end of the earth, *Dan. iv. 22.—v. 19.* Note, God is the fountain of power; the kingdoms of the earth are at his dispose: whatever share any have of them, they have it from him: and those whom God has intrusted with great power and large possessions, should look upon themselves as obliged thereby to do much for him. (2.) In obedience to God. He hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem; probably by a dream or a vision of the night, confirmed by comparing it with the prophecy of Isaiah, where his doing it was foretold, Israel's disobedience to God's charge, which they were often told of, is aggravated by the obedience of this heathen king.

2. He gives free leave to all the Jews that were in his dominions to go up to Jerusalem, and to build the temple of the Lord there, *ver. 3.* His regard to God made him overlook, (1.) The secular interests of his government: it had been his policy to keep so great a number of serviceable men in his dominions, and seemed impolitic to let them go and take root again in their own land, but piety is the best policy. (2.) The honour of the religion of his country. Why did he not order them to build a temple to the gods of Babylon or Persia? No, he believes the God of Israel to be the God of heaven, and therefore obligeth his Israel to worship him only; let them walk in the name of the Lord their God.

3. He subjoins a brief for a collection to bear their expences that were poor, and not able to bear their own, *ver. 4.* Whosoever remaineth, because he has not wherewithal to bear his charges to Jerusalem, let the men of his place help him; some take it as an order to the king's officers to supply them out of his revenue, as *chap. vi. 8.* But it may mean a warrant to the captives, to ask and receive the alms and charitable contributions of all the king's loving subjects. And we may suppose the Jews had carried themselves so well among their neighbours, that they would be as forward to accommodate them, because they loved them, as the Egyptians were, because they were weary of them. At least many would be kind to them, because they saw the government would take it well. Cyrus not only gave his good wishes with them that went, *their God be with them, ver. 3.* but took care also to furnish them with such things as they needed. He took it for granted, those among them that were of ability would offer their free-will offering for the house of God, to promote the rebuilding of it. But besides that he would have them supplied out of his kingdom. Well-wishers to the temple should be well doers for it.

5. ¶ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised to go up, to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. 6. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. 7. ¶ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods: 8. Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, 10. Thirty basons of gold; silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11. All the vessels of gold and of silver, were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity, that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

We are here told,

1. How Cyrus's proclamation succeeded with others.

(1.) He having given leave to the Jews to go up to Jerusalem, many of them went up accordingly, *ver. 5.* The leaders herein were the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, eminent and experienced men, from whom it might justly be expected, that as they were above their brethren in dignity, so they should go before them in duty. The priests and Levites were (as became them) with the first that set their faces again towards Zion. If any good work is to be done, let ministers lead in it. They that accompanied them were such as God had inclined to go up. The same God that had raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim this liberty, raised up their spirits to take the benefit of it, for it was done, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, *Zech. iv. 6.* The temptation perhaps was strong to some of them to stay in Babylon, they had convenient settlements there, had contracted an acquaintance with the neighbours that was pleasing enough to them, and were ready to say, *It is good to be here*: the discouragements of their return were many and great, the journey long, their wives and children unfit for travel, their own land was to them a strange land, the road to it an unknown road. Go up to Jerusalem? And what should they do there? It was all in ruins, and in the midst of enemies, to whom they would be an easy prey; many were wrought upon by these considerations to stay in Babylon, at least not to go with the first; but there were some that broke through these difficulties, ventured to break the ice, and feared not the lion in the way, the lion in the streets; and they were those whose spirits God raised. He, by his Spirit and grace, filled them with a generous ambition of liberty, a gracious affection to their own land,

and a desire of the free and public exercise of their religion. Had God left them to themselves, and to the counsels of flesh and blood, they had staid in Babylon, but he put it into their hearts to set their faces Sionward, and as strangers to ask the way thither, (*Jer. l. 5.*) for they being a new generation, went out like their father Abraham from this land of the Chaldees, not knowing whither they went, *Ileb. xi. 8.* Note, whatever good we do, it is owing purely to the grace of God, and he raiseth up our spirits to the doing of it; *works in us both to will and to do.* Our spirits naturally incline to this earth and to the things of it; if they move upwards in any good affections or good actions, it is God that raiseth them.

The call and offer of the gospel is like Cyrus's proclamation, *deliverance is preached to the captives*, *Luke iv. 18.* Those that are bound under the unrighteous dominion of sin, and bound over to the righteous judgment of God, may be made free by Jesus Christ: whoever will by repentance and faith return to God, his duty to God, his happiness in God, Jesus Christ has opened the way for him, and let him go up out of the slavery of sin into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The offer is general to all: Christ makes it in pursuance of the grant which the Father has made him of all power both in heaven and in earth, a much greater dominion than that given to Cyrus, *ver. 2.* and of the charge given him to build God a house, to set him up a church in the world, a kingdom among men. Many that hear this joyful sound choose to sit still in Babylon, are in love with their sins, and will not venture upon the difficulties of a holy life; but some there are that break through the discouragements, and resolve to build the house of God, to make heaven of their religion whatever it cost them; and they are those whose spirit God hath raised above the world and the flesh, and whom he has made willing in the day of his power, *Pf. cx. 3.* Thus will the heavenly Canaan be replenished, though many perish in Babylon; and the gospel-offer will not be made in vain.

2. Cyrus having given orders that their neighbours should help them, they did so, *ver. 6.* All they that were about them, furnished them with plate and goods to bear the charges of their journey, and to help them in building and furnishing both their own houses and God's. As the tabernacle was made of the spoils of Egypt, and the first temple built by the labours of the strangers, so the second by the contributions of the Chaldeans, all intimating the admission of the Gentiles into the church in due time. God can where he pleases incline the hearts of strangers to be kind to his people, and make those to strengthen their hands that have weakened them, *the earth helped the woman. Besides what was willingly offered by the Jews themselves, who staid behind from a principle of love to God and his house, much was offered, as one may say, unwillingly, by the Babylonians, who were influenced to do it by a divine power on their minds, which they themselves could give no account of.*

2. How this proclamation was seconded by Cyrus himself. To give proof of the sincerity of his affection to the house of God, he not only released the people of God, but restored the vessels of the temple, *ver. 7, 8.* Observe here, (1.) How careful providence was of the vessels of the temple, that they were not lost, melted down, or so mixed with other vessels that they could not be known, but that they were all now forthcoming: such care God has of the living vessels of mercy, vessels of honour, of whom it is said, *2 Tim. ii. 19, 20. The Lord knows them that are his*, and they shall none of them perish. (2.) That though they had been put into an idol's temple, and probably used in the service of idols, yet they were given back to be used for God. God will recover his own; and the spoil of the strong man armed shall be converted to the use of the conqueror. (3.) That Judah had a prince, even in captivity. Sheshbazzar, supposed to be the same with Zerubbabel is here called prince of Judah; the Chaldeans called him Sheshbazzar, which signifies joy in tribulation; but among his own people he went by the name of Zerubbabel, a stranger in Babylon; so he looked upon himself, and that Jerusalem was his home, though, as Josephus saith, he was captain of the life-guard to the king of Babylon. He took care of the affairs of the Jews, and had some authority over them, probably since the death of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who made him his heir, he being of the house of David. (4.) That to him the sacred vessels were numbered out, *ver. 8.* And he took care for their safe conveyance to Jerusalem, *ver. 11.* It would encourage them to build the temple, that they had so much rich furniture ready to put in it when it was built. Though God's ordinances, like the vessels of the sanctuary, may be corrupted and profaned by the New Testament Babylon, they shall in due time be restored to their primitive use and intention, for not one jot or tittle of divine institution shall fall to the ground.

C H A P. II.

That many returned out of Babylon upon Cyrus's proclamation we were told in the foregoing chapter, we have here a catalogue of the several families that returned, *ver. 1.* (1.) The leaders, *ver. 2.* (2.) The people, *ver. 3—35.* (3.) The priests, Levites, and retainers to the people, *ver. 36—63.* (4.) The sum total, with an account of their retinue, *ver. 64—67.* (5.) Their offerings to the service of the temple, *ver. 68, 69, 70.*

1. NOW these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; 2. Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel. 3. The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 4. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5. The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8. The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10. The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12. The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13. The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty

sixty and six. 14. The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15. The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18. The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. 19. The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20. The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. 21. The children of Beth-lehem, an hundred twenty and three. 22. The men of Netophah, fifty and six. 23. The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 24. The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25. The children of Kirjah-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. 26. The children of Rama and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27. The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. 28. The men of Beth-el and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29. The children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30. The children of Magbith, an hundred fifty and six. 31. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33. The children of Lod, Hadid and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35. The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

We may observe here,

1. That an account was kept in writing of the families that came up out of captivity, and the numbers of each family, (1.) For their honour, as part of their recompence for their faith and courage, their confidence in God, and their affection to their own land, and to stir up others to imitate their good example. Those that honour God, he will thus honour. The names of all those Israelites indeed, that accept the offer of deliverance by Christ, shall be found to their honour in a more sacred record than this, even in the *Lamb's book of life*. (2.) For the benefit of posterity, that they might know from whom they descended, and to whom they were allied.

2. That they are called *children of the province*. Judah that had been an illustrious kingdom, to which other kingdoms had been made provinces subject to it and dependent on it, now was itself made a province, to receive laws and commissions from the king of Persia, and to be accountable to him. See how sin diminisheth and debaseth a nation, which righteousness would exalt. But by thus being made servants, as the patriarchs being sojourners in their own country which was theirs by promise, they were minded of the *better country, that is the heavenly*, Heb. xi. 14. a *kingdom that cannot be moved*, or changed into a province.

3. That they are said to come *every one to his city*, i. e. the city appointed them, in which appointment an eye no doubt was had to their former settlement by Joshua, and to that as near as might be they returned, for it doth not appear that any others, at least some that were able to oppose them, had possessed them in their absence.

4. That the leaders are first mentioned, ver. 2. Zerubbabel and Jeshua were their Moses and Aaron, the former their chief prince, the latter their chief priest. Nehemiah and Mordecai are mentioned here; some think not the same with the famous men we afterwards meet with of those names: probably they were the same; but afterwards returned to court for the service of their country.

5. Some of these several families are named from the persons that were their ancestors, others from the places in which they had formerly resided; as with us many surnames are the proper names of persons, others of places.

6. Some little difference there is between the numbers of some of the families here and in *Neh. vii.* where this catalogue is repeated; which might arise from this, that some who had given in their names at first to come, afterwards drew back, said, *I go, Sir, but went not*, which would lessen the number of the families they belonged to; other that declined at first, afterwards repented and went, and so increased the number.

7. Here are two families that are called the children of Flam, one ver. 7. another ver. 31. and, which is strange, the number of both is the same, one thousand two hundred fifty-four.

8. The children of Adonikem, which signifies a high lord, were six hundred sixty-six, just the number of the *beast*, Rev. xiii. 18. which is there said to be the number of a man, which Mr. Hugh Broughton thinks has reference to this man.

9. The children of Bethlehem (ver. 21.) were but one hundred twenty-three, though it was David's city; for Bethlehem was *little among the thousands of Judah*, yet there must the Messiah arise, *Mic. v. 2.*

10. Anathoth had been a famous place in the tribe of Benjamin, and yet here it numbered but one hundred twenty-eight, ver. 23. which is to be imputed to the divine curse, which the men of Anathoth brought upon themselves by persecuting Jeremiah, who was of their city, *Jer. xi. 21—23. there shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth.* And see *Isa. x. 30. O poor Anathoth!* nothing brings ruin on a people sooner than persecution.

36. ¶ The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 37. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 38. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 39. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. 40. ¶ The Levites: the children of Jeshua, and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. 41. ¶ The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight. 42. ¶ The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all, an hundred thirty and nine. 43. ¶ The Nethinims: the children of Ziba, the children of Haphupha, the children of Tabbaoth. 44. The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon,

45. The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagab, the children of Akkub, 46. The children of Hagab, the children of Shamlai, the children of Hanan, 47. The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, 48. The children of Rezin, the children of Nekodah, the children of Gaz-zam, 49. The children of Uz-ziah, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai, 50. The children of Asnah, the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim, 51. The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 52. The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 53. The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah, 54. The children of Ne-ziah, the children of Hatipha. 55. ¶ The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, 56. The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 57. The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. 58. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two. 59. And these were they which went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel: 60. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two. 61. ¶ And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai (which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name): 62. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 63. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

Here is, 1. An account of the priests that returned, and they were a considerable number; about a tenth part of the whole company; for the whole were forty-two thousand and odd, ver. 64. and four families of priests made up forty-two hundred and odd, ver. 36—39. thus was the tenth God's part; a blessed decimation. Three of the fathers of the priests here named were heads of courses, 1 *Chron. xxiv. 7, 8, 14.* The fourth is Pashur, ver. 38. if these were of the posterity of that Pashur that abused Jeremiah, *Jer. xx. 1.* it is strange that so ill a man should have so good a seed, and so numerous.

2. Of the Levites, and I cannot but admire at the small number of them, for taking in both the singers and the porters, ver. 40, 41, 42, they did not make three hundred and fifty. Time was, when the Levites were more forward to their duty than the priests, 2 *Chron. xxix. 34.* but they were not so now. If one place, one family, has the reputation for pious zeal now, another may have it another time. *The wind blows where it listeth*, and shifts its point.

3. Of the Nethinims, who it is supposed were the Gibeonites, given (so their name signifies) by Joshua first, *Josh. ix. 27.* and again by David, *Ezra viii. 20.* when Saul had expelled them, to be employed by the Levites in the work of God's house as hewers of wood and drawers of water; and with them of the children of Solomon's servants, whom he gave for the like use (whether they were Jews or Gentiles doth not appear) and who are here taken notice of among the retainers of the temple, and numbered with the Nethinims, ver. 55—58. Note, It is an honour to belong to God's house, though in the meanest office there.

4. Of some that were looked upon as Israelites by birth, and others as priests, and yet could not make out a clear title to the honour.

1. There were some that could not prove themselves Israelites, ver. 59, 60. A considerable number, who presumed they were of the seed of Jacob, but could not produce their pedigrees, and yet would go up to Jerusalem, having an affection to the house and people of God; these shamed those who were true-born Israelites, and yet not to be called Israelites indeed; *came out of the waters of Judah*, *Isa. xlviii. 1.* but had lost the relish of these waters.

2. There were others that could not prove themselves priests, and yet were supposed to be of the seed of Aaron. What is not preserved in black and white, will in all likelihood be forgotten in a little time. Now we are here told, (1.) How they lost their evidence. One of their ancestors married a daughter of Barzillai, that great man whom we read of in David's time, was proud of an alliance to that honourable family, and preferring that before the dignity of his priesthood, would have his children called after Barzillai's family; and their pedigree preserved in the registers of that house, not of the house of Aaron, and so they lost it. In Babylon, there was nothing to be got by the priesthood, and therefore they cared not for being akin to it. Those who think their ministry, or their relation to ministers, a diminution or disparagement to them, forget who it was that said, *I magnify my office.* (2.) What they lost with it. It should not be taken for granted, when they could not produce their proofs, but they were, *as polluted, put from the priesthood.* Now the priests had recovered their rights, and had the altar to live upon again, they would gladly be looked upon as priests. But they had sold their birth-right for the honour of being gentlemen, and therefore were justly degraded, and forbidden to eat of the most holy things. Note, Christ will be ashamed of those that are ashamed of him and his service.

It was the Tirshatha, or governor, that put them under this sequestration, which some understand of Zerubbabel the present governor, others of Nehemiah, who is so called, *Neh. viii. 9—x. 1.* and gave this order when he came some years after. But the prohibition was not absolute, it was only a suspension, till there should be a high-priest with Urim and Thummim, by whom they might know God's mind in this matter. This, it seems, was expected and desired, but it doth not appear that ever they were blessed with it under the second temple. They had the canon of the Old Testament complete

complete, which was better than Urim; and by the want of that oracle, were taught to expect the Messiah the great oracle, which the Urim and Thummin was but a type of. Nor doth it appear, that the second temple had the ark in it, either the old one or a new one; those shadows by degrees vanished, as the substance approached; and God by the prophet intimates to his people, that they should sustain no damage by the want of the ark, *Jer. iii. 16, In those days, when they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, they shall say no more the ark of the covenant of the Lord, neither shall it come to mind, for they shall do well enough without it.*

64. ¶ The whole congregation together, was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore. 65. Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing-men and singing-women. 66. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six: their mules two hundred forty and five: 67. Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty. 68. ¶ And some of the chiefs of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: 69. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work, threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. 70. So the priests and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Here is, 1. The sum total of the company that returned now out of Babylon. The particular sums before-mentioned amount not quite to thirty thousand, (twenty-nine thousand eight hundred and eighteen) so that there were above twelve thousand that came not into any of those accounts, who, it is probable, were of the rest of the tribes of Israel, besides Judah and Benjamin, that could not tell of what particular family or city they were, but that they were Israelites, and of what tribe. Now, (1.) This was more than double the number that were carried captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, so that, as in Egypt, the time of their affliction was the time of their increase. (2.) These were but few to begin a nation with, and yet, by virtue of the old promise made to their fathers, they multiplied so as before their last destruction by the Romans, about five hundred years after, to be a very populous country. When God saith, increase and multiply, a little one shall become a thousand.

2. Their retinue. They were themselves little better than servants, and therefore no wonder their servants were comparatively but few, *ver. 65.* and their beasts of burden about as many, *ver. 66, 67.* It was not with them now, as in the days past. But notice is taken of two hundred singing-men and women they had among them, who we will suppose intended as those, *2 Chron. xxxv. 25.* to excite their mourning, for it was foretold they should upon this occasion go weeping, *Jer. l. 4.* with ditties of lamentation.

3. Their oblations. It is said, *ver. 68, 69.* (1.) That they came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, and yet that house, that holy and beautiful house, was now in ruins, a heap of rubbish; but, like their father Abraham, when the altar was gone they came with devotion to the place of the altar, *Gen. xiii. 4.* and it is the character of the genuine sons of Zion, that they favour even the dust thereof, *Psal. cii. 14.* (2.) That they offered freely towards the setting of it up in his place. That, it seems, was the first house they talked of setting up, and though they came off a journey, and were beginning the world, two chargeable things, yet they offered, and offered freely towards the building of the temple. Let none complain of the necessary expences of their religion, but believe, that when they come to balance the account, they will find it quit cost. Their offering was nothing in comparison with the offerings of the princes in David's time; then they offered by talents, *1 Chron. xxix. 7.* now by drams, yet these drams being after their ability, were as acceptable to God as those talents, like the widows two mites. The sixty-one thousand drams of gold amount, by Cumberland's calculation, to so many pounds of our money, and so many groats. Every maneh, or pound of silver, he reckons to be sixty shekels, *viz. thirty ounces*, which we may reckon seven pounds ten shillings of our money, so that this five thousand pounds of silver will be above thirty-seven thousand of our money. It seems God had blessed them with the increase of their wealth, as well as of their numbers in Babylon, and as God had prospered them, they gave cheerfully to the service of his house. (3.) That they dwelt in their cities, *ver. 70.* Though their cities were out of repair, yet because they were their cities, such as God had assigned them, they were content to dwell in them, and were thankful for liberty and property; though they had little of pomp, plenty or power. Their poverty was a bad cause, but their unity and unanimity was a good effect of it. Here was room enough for them all, and all their substance, so that there was no strife among them, but perfect harmony, a blessed presage of their settlement, as their discords in the latter times of that state were of their ruin.

C H A P. III.

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left Israel in their cities, but we may well imagine what an ill posture their affairs were in, the ground untilled, the cities in ruins, all out of order; but here we have an account of the early care they took about the re-establishment of religion among them. Thus did they lay the foundation well, and begin their work at the right end. (1.) They set up an altar, and offered sacrifices upon it, kept the feasts, and contributed towards the re-building of the temple, *ver. 1-7.* (2.) They laid the foundation of the temple with a mixture of joy and sorrow, *ver. 8-13.* This was the day of small things, which was not to be despised, *Zech. iv. 10.*

1. **A**ND when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. 2. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests; and Zerubbabel the son of Sheal-

tiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. 3. And they set the altar upon his bases, (for fear was upon them, because of the people of those countries) and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt-offerings, morning and evening. 4. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by numbers, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; 5. And afterward offered the continual burnt-offering, both of the new-moons and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a free-will offering unto the LORD. 6. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD: but the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. 7. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters, and meat, and drink, and oil unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar-trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa: according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

Here is, 1. A general assembly of the returned Israelites at Jerusalem, in the seventh month, *ver. 1.* We may suppose they came from Babylon in the spring, and must allow at least four months for the journey, for so long Ezra and his company were in coming, *Ezra vii. 9.* the seventh month therefore soon came, in which many of the feasts of the Lord were to be solemnised, and then they gathered themselves together by agreement among themselves, rather than by the command of authority, to Jerusalem. Though they were newly come to their cities, and had their hands full of business there, to provide necessaries for themselves and their families, which might have excused them from attending on God's altar till the hurry was a little over, as many foolishly put off their coming to the communion, till they are settled in the world, yet such was their zeal for religion, now they were newly come from under correction for their irreligion, that they left all their business in the country to attend God's altar; and (which is strange) in this pious zeal they were all of a mind, they came as one man. Let worldly business be postponed to the business of religion, and it will prosper the better.

3. The care which their leading men took to have an altar ready for them to attend upon. Jeshua and his brethren the priests, Zerubbabel and his brethren the princes, built the altar of the God of Israel, *ver. 2.* in the same place (it is likely) where it had stood, upon the same bases, *ver. 3.* Bishop Patrick observing, that before the temple was built there seems to have been a tabernacle pitched for the divine service, as was in David's time, not on mount Moriah, but mount Sion, *1 Chron. ix. 11-18-23.* supposeth this altar was erected there, to be used while the temple was in building. Let us learn hence, (1.) To begin with God. The more difficult and necessitous our case is, the more concerned we are to take him along with us in all our ways. If we expect to be directed by his oracles, let him be honoured by our offerings. (2.) To do what we can in the worship of God, when we cannot do what we would. They could not presently have a temple, but they could not do without an altar. Abraham wherever he came built an altar; and wherever we come, though we may perhaps want the benefit of the candlestick of preaching and the shew-bread of the eucharist, yet if we bring not the sacrifices of prayer and praise, we are wanting in our duty, for we have an altar that sanctifies the gift ever ready.

Observe the reason here given why they hastened to set up the altar. Fear was upon them, because of the people of the land; they were in the midst of enemies that bore ill will to them and their religion, for whom they were an unequal match. And (1.) Though they were so, yet they built the altar, so some read it; they would not be frightened from their religion by the opposition they were like to meet with in it. Never let the fear of man bring us into the snare. (2.) Because they were so, therefore they set up the altar. Apprehension of danger should stir us up to our duty. Have we many enemies? Then it is good to have God our friend, and to keep up our correspondence with him. This good use we should make of our fears, we should be driven by them to our knees. Even Saul would think himself undone, if the enemy should come upon him before he had made his supplication to God, *1 Sam. xii. 13.*

3. The sacrifices they offered upon the altar. The altar was reared to be used, and they used it accordingly. Let not those that have an altar starve it.

(1.) They began on the first day of the seventh month, *ver. 6.* It doth not appear they had any fire from heaven to begin with, as Moses and Solomon had, but common fire served them, as it did the patriarchs.

(2.) Having begun, they kept up the continual burnt-offering, *ver. 5.* morning and evening, *ver. 3.* They had known by sad experience what it was to want the comfort of the daily sacrifice, to plead in their daily prayers, and now it was revived they resolved not to let it fall again. The daily lamb typified the Lamb of God, whose righteousness must be our confidence in all our prayers. (3.) They observed all the set feasts of the Lord, and offered the sacrifices appointed for each, and particularly the feast of tabernacles, *ver. 4, 5.* Now they had received such great mercy from God, that joyful feast was in a special manner seasonable: And now they were beginning to settle in their cities, it might do well to remember their fathers dwelling in tents in the wilderness. That feast also, which had a peculiar reference to gospel times, (as appears *Zech. xiv. 18.*) was brought in a special manner into reputation, now those times drew on. Of the service of this feast, which continued seven days, and had peculiar sacrifices appointed, it is said, they did as the duty of every day required. See *Numb. xxix. 13, 17, &c.* The work, or matter of the day in its day. So it is in the original, *Verbum decus in die suo.* A phrase that has become proverbial with those that have used themselves to scripture language; and if the feast of tabernacles was a figure of gospel conversation, in respect of continual weanedness from the world and joy in God; we may infer, that it concerns us all to do the work of the day in its day, according as the duty of the day requires, that is, (1.) We must improve time, by finding some business to do every day, that will turn to a good account. (2.) We must improve opportunity, by accommodating ourselves to that which is the proper business of the present day. Every thing is beautiful in its season. The tenth day of this month was the day of atonement, a solemn day, and very seasonable now: it is very probable they observed it, yet it is not mentioned, nor indeed in all the Old Testament do I remember the least mention of the observance of that day:

as if it were enough, that we have the law of it, *Lev. xvi.* and the gospel of it, which was the chief intention of it, in the New Testament.

(4.) They offered every man's free-will offering, *ver. 5.* The law required much, but they brought more: for though they had little wealth to support the expences of their sacrifices, they had much zeal, and we may suppose, spared at their own tables, that they might plentifully supply God's altar. Happy they, that bring with them out of the furnace of affliction such a holy heat as this!

4. The preparation they made for the building of the temple, *ver. 7.* This they applied themselves immediately to; for while we do what we can, we must still be aiming to do more and better. Tyre and Sidon must now, as of old, furnish them with workmen, and Lebanon with timber, orders for both which they had from Cyrus; what God calls us to, we may depend upon his providence to furnish us with.

8. Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the son of Jozadab, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem: and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. 9. Then stood Jeshua with his sons, and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadab, with their sons, and their brethren the Levites, 10. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set their priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12. But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: 13. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy, from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

There was no dispute among the returned Jews, whether they should build the temple or no, that was immediately resolved on, and that it should be done with all speed; what comfort could they take in their own land, if they had not that token of God's presence with them, and the record of his name among them? We have here therefore an account of the beginning of that good work. Observe,

1. When it was begun, in the second day of the second month, as soon as ever the season of the year would permit, (*ver. 8.*) and when they had ended the solemnities of the passover. They took little more than half a year for making preparation of the ground and materials; so much were their hearts upon it. Note, When any good work is to be done, it will be our wisdom to set about it quickly, and not to lose time; yea, though we foresee difficulty and opposition in it. Thus we engage ourselves to it, and engage God for us. Well begun (we say) is half ended.

2. Who began it, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and their brethren. Then the work of God is likely to go on well, when magistrates, ministers, and people, are hearty for it, and agree in their places to promote it. It was God that gave them one heart for this service, and it boded well.

3. Who were employed to further it. They appointed the Levites to set forward the work, *ver. 8.* and they did it by setting forward the workmen, *ver. 9.* and strengthening their hands with good and comfortable words. Note, They that do not work themselves, may yet do good service by quickening and encouraging those that do work.

4. How God was praised at the laying of the foundation of the temple, *ver. 10, 11.* The priests with the trumpets, appointed by Moses, and the Levites with the cymbals, appointed by David, made up a concert of music, not to please the ear, but to assist the singing of that everlasting hymn which will never be out of date, and to which our tongues should never be out of tune, *God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever.* The burden of *Psal. cxxxvi.* Let all the streams of mercy be run up to the fountain. Whatever our condition is, how many savor our griefs and fears, let it be owned that God is good; and whatever fails, that his mercy fails not. Let this be sung with application, as here; not only his mercy endures for ever, but it endures for ever towards Israel; Israel, when captives in a strange land, and strangers in their own land. However it be, yet *God is good to Israel,* *Psal. lxxiii.* 1. good to us. Let the reviving of the church's interests, when they seemed dead, be ascribed to the continuance of God's mercy for ever, for therefore the church continues.

5. How the people were differently affected. A remarkable mixture of various affections there was upon this occasion. Different sentiments there were among the people of God, and each expressed himself according to his sentiments, and yet there was no disagreement among them, their minds were not alienated from each other, nor the common concern retarded by it.

1. Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all, when they saw but the foundation of one laid, praised the Lord with shouts of joy, *ver. 11.* To them even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls even this was sweet. They shouted to that the noise was heard afar off. Note, We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though it be not yet come to perfection; and the foundation of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be fountains of joy to every faithful Israelite.

2. Those that remembered the glory of the first temple, which Solomon built, and considered how far this was likely to be inferior to that, perhaps in dimensions, however in magnificence and sumptuousness, *wept with a loud voice,* *ver. 12.* If we date the captivity with the first, from the fourth of Jehoiakim, it was but about fifty-two years since the temple was burnt, if from Jeconiah's captivity, it was but fifty-nine. So that many now

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alive might remember it standing; and a great mercy it was to the captives, that they had the lives of so many of their priests and Levites lengthened out, who could tell them what they themselves remembered of the glory of Jerusalem, to quicken them in their return. These lamented the disproportion between this temple and the former. And (1.) There was some reason for it, and if they turned their tears into the right channel, and bewailed the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. Sin sullies the glory of any church or people, and when they find themselves diminished and brought low, they must bear the blame. (2.) Yet it was their infirmity to mingle those tears with the common joys, and to cast a damp upon them. They despised the day of small things; and were unthankful for the good they enjoyed, because it was not so much as their ancestors had, though it was much more than they deserved. In the harmony of public joys let not us be jarring strings. It was an aggravation of the discouragement they hereby gave to the people, that they were priests and Levites, who should have known and taught others to be duly affected under various providences, and not to let the remembrance of former afflictions drown the sense of present mercies.

This mixture of sorrow and joy here is a representation of this world; some are bathing in rivers of joy, while others are drowning in floods of tears. In heaven all are singing and none sighing, in hell all are weeping and wailing, and none rejoicing, but here on earth we can scarce discern the shouts of joy from the noise of the weeping. Let us learn to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep; and ourselves to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and weep as though we wept not.

C H A P. IV.

The good work of rebuilding the temple was no sooner begun, but it presently met with opposition from those that bore ill will to it; the Samaritans were enemies to the Jews and their religion, and they set themselves to obstruct it. (1.) They offered to come in partners in the building of it, that they might have it in their power to retard it, but were refused, *ver. 1—3.* (2.) They discouraged them in it, and dissuaded them from it, *ver. 4, 5.* (3.) They basely misrepresented the undertaking and the undertakers to the king of Persia, by a memorial they sent him, *ver. 6—16.* (4.) They obtained from him an order to stop the building, *ver. 17—22.* which they immediately put in execution, *ver. 23, 24.*

1. NOW when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel: 2. Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers; and said unto them, Let us build with you, for we seek your God, as ye do, and we do sacrifice unto him, since the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assur, which brought us up hither. 3. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chiefs of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us, to build an house unto our God, but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. 4. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, 5. And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

We have here an instance of the old enmity that was put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. God's temple cannot be built but Satan will rage, and the gates of hell will fight against it. The gospel kingdom was in like manner to be set up with much struggle and contention. And in this respect the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former, and it was more a figure of the temple of Christ's church, in that Solomon built his temple when there was no adversary nor evil occurrence, 1 Kings v. 4. But this second temple was built notwithstanding great opposition, in the removing and conquering of which, and the bringing of the work to perfection at last in despite of it, the wisdom, power, and goodness of God was much glorified, and the church encouraged to trust in him.

1. The undertakers are here called the children of captivity, *ver. 1.* which makes them look very little. They were newly come out of captivity, were born in captivity, had still the marks of their captivity upon them, though they were not now captives, they were under the control of those whose captives they had lately been. Israel was God's son, his first born, but by their iniquity they sold and enslaved themselves, and so became children of the captivity; but it should seem, the thought of their being so quickened them to this work, for it was by their neglect of the temple that they lost their freedom.

2. The opposers of the undertaking are here said to be the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, not the Chaldeans or Persians, they gave them no disturbance, let them build and welcome, but the relics of the ten tribes, and the foreigners that had joined themselves to them, and patched up that mongrel religion we had account of, 2 Kings xvii. 33. They feared the Lord, and served their own gods too. They are called the people of the land, *ver. 4.* The worst enemies Judah and Benjamin had, were these that said they were Jews, and were not, *Rev. iii. 9.*

3. The opposition they gave, had in it much of the subtilty of the old serpent. When they heard that the temple was in building, they were presently aware it would be a fatal blow to their superstition, and set themselves to oppose it. They had now power to do it forcibly, but they try all the ways they can to do it effectually.

1. They offered their service to build with them, only that thereby they might get an opportunity to retard the work, while they pretended to further it.

Now, (1.) Their offer was plausible enough, and looked kind, *we will build with you,* will help you to contrive, and will contribute towards the expence; *for we seek your God as you do,* *ver. 2.* This was false, for though they sought the same God, they did not seek him only, nor seek him in the way he appointed, and therefore did not seek him as they did. Herein they designed, if it were possible, to hinder the building of it, however to hinder their comfortable enjoyment of it; as good almost not have it, as not have it to themselves, for the pure worship of the true God, and him only. Thus are the kisses of an enemy deceitful; his words smoother than butter, when war is in his heart.

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But, 2. Their refusal of their proffered service was very just, *ver. 3.* The chief of the fathers of *Shinai* were soon aware that they meant them no kindness; whatever they pretended, but really designed to do them a mischief, and therefore though they had need enough of help, if it had been such as they could confide in, told them plainly, *you have nothing to do with us.* have no part nor lot in this matter, are not true-born Israelites, nor faithful worshippers of God, *for worship you know not what,* *John iv. 22.* You are a race of those with whom we dare not have communion, and therefore *we ourselves will build;* they plead not to them the law of their God, which forbid them to mingle themselves with strangers, though that especially they had an eye to, but that which they would take more notice of, the king's command, which was directed to them only, the king of Persia has commanded us to build this house, and we shall distrust and affront him, if we call in a foreign aid. Note, In doing good there is need of the wisdom of the serpent, as well as the innocence of the dove, and we have need, as it follows there, to beware of men, *Matt. x. 16, 17.* Take heed who we go partners with, and on whose hand we lean. While we trust God with a pious confidence, we must trust men with a prudent jealousy and caution.

2. When the plot failed, they did what they could to divert them from the work, and discourage them in it, weakened their hands, by telling them it was in vain to attempt it, calling them *foolish builders*, who began what they were not able to finish, and by their insinuations troubled them, and made them drive heavily in it: all were not alike zealous in it; those that were cool and indifferent were by these artifices drawn off from the work which wanted their help, *ver. 4.* And because what they themselves said the Jews would suspect to be ill meant, and not be influenced by, they under-hand hired counsellors against them, that pretending to advise them for the best, should dissuade them from proceeding, and so frustrate their purpose, *v. 5.* or dissuade the men of Tyre and Sidon from furnishing them with the timber they had bargained for, *chap. iii. 7.* Or, what business they had at the Persian court, to solicit for any particular grants or favours, pursuant to the general edict for their liberty, there were those that were hired, and lay ready to appear of counsel against them. Wonder not at the selfishness of the church's enemies in their attempts against the building of God's temple; he whom they serve, and whose work they are doing, is *unwearied in walking to and fro through the earth* to do mischief. And let those who discourage a good work, and weaken the hands of them that are employed in it, see whose pattern they follow.

6. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. 7. ¶ And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia: and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. 8. Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king, in this sort: 9. Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharhites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Sufanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites. 10. And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time. 11. ¶ This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time. 12. Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us, are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. 13. Be it known now unto the king, that if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings. 14. Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour: therefore have we sent and certified the king, 15. That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. 16. We certify the king, that if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

Cyrus steadfastly adhered to the Jews' interest, and supported his own grant, it was to no purpose to offer any thing to him in prejudice of it, what he did was from a good principle of the fear of God, and therefore he stuck to it; but though his reign in all was thirty years, yet after the conquest of Babylon, and his decree for the release of the Jews, some think he reigned but three years, others seven, and then either died, or gave up that part of his government, in which his successor was Ahasuerus, *ver. 6.* called also Artaxerxes, *ver. 7.* Supposed to be the same that in heathen authors is called Cambyses, who had never taken that cognizance of the despised Jews, as to concern himself for them, nor had he that knowledge of the God of Israel that his predecessor had; to him these Samaritans applied themselves by letter, for an order to stop the building of the temple: and they did it in the beginning of his reign, being resolved to lose no time, when they thought they had a king for their purpose. See how watchful the church's enemies are to take the first opportunity of doing it a mischief; let not its friends be less careful to do it a kindness. Here is,

1. The general purport of the letter which they sent to the king, to inform him of this matter. It is called, *ver. 6.* An accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. The devil is the accuser of the brethren, *Rev. xii. 10.* And he carries on his malicious designs against them, not

only by accusing them himself before our God, as he did Job, but by acting as a lying spirit in the mouths of his instruments, whom he employs to accuse them before the magistrates and kings, and to make them odious to the many, and obnoxious to the mighty. Marvel not, if the same arts be still used to run down serious godliness.

2. The persons concerned in writing this letter. The contrivers are named, *ver. 7.* that plotted the thing; the writers, *ver. 8.* that put it into form, and the subscribers, *ver. 9.* that concurred in it, and joined with them in this representation, this misrepresentation I should call it. Now see here, (1.) How the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his temple, with their companions: the building of the temple would do them no harm, yet they appear against it with the utmost concern, perhaps, because the prophets of the God of Israel hath foretold the *famishing and perishing* of all the gods of the heathen, *Zeph. ii. 11.* *Jer. x. 11.* (2.) How the people concurred with them in imagining this villainy. They followed the cry, though ignorant of the merits of the cause; all the several colonies of that plantation (nine are here mentioned) who had their denomination from the cities or countries of Assyria, Chaldea, Persia, &c. from whence they came; set their hands by their representatives to this letter: perhaps they were incensed against these returned Jews, because many of the ten tribes were among them, whose estates they were got into the possession of, and of whom they were therefore jealous, lest they should attempt the recovery of them hereafter.

3. A copy of the letter itself which Ezra inserts here out of the records of the kingdom of Persia, into which it hath been entered; and it is well we have it, that we may see whence the like methods still taken to expose good people, and baffle good designs, are copied.

4. They represent themselves as very loyal to the government, and mightily concerned for the honour and interest of it, and would have it thought that the king had no such loving faithful subjects in all his dominions as they were, nor so sensible of their obligations to him, *ver. 14.* Because we are salted with the salt of the palace, so it is in the margin: we have our salary from the court, and could no more live without it, than flesh could be preserved without salt; or, as some think, their pay or pension was sent them in salt; or, because we had our education in the palace, and were brought up at the king's table, as we find, *Dan. i. 5.* those were whom he intended to prefer, they did eat their portion of the king's meat. Now, in consideration of this, it is not meet for us to see the king's dishonour; and therefore they urge him to stop the building of the temple, which would certainly be to the king's dishonour more than any thing else. Note, A secret enmity to Christ and his gospel, is often gilded over with a pretended affection to Caesar and his power. The Jews hated the Roman government, and yet, to serve a turn, could cry, *We have no king but Caesar.* But (to allude to this) if they that lived upon the crown, thought themselves bound in gratitude thus to support the interest of it, much more reason have we thus to argue ourselves into a pious concern for God's honour; we have our maintenance from the God of heaven, and are salted with his salt, live upon his bounty, and are the care of his providence, and therefore it is not meet for us to see his dishonour, without resenting it, and doing what we can to prevent it.

2. They represented the Jews as disloyal, and dangerous to the government; that Jerusalem was the rebellious and bad city, *ver. 12.* hurtful to the kings and provinces, *ver. 15.* See how Jerusalem, the joy of the whole earth, *Psal. xlviii. 2.* is here reproached as the scandal of the whole earth. The enemies of the church could not do the ill things they design against it, if they did not first put it into an ill name. Jerusalem had been a loyal city to its rightful princes, and its present inhabitants were as well affected to the king and his government, as any of his provinces whatsoever. Daniel, who was a Jew, had lately approved himself so faithful to his prince, that his worst enemies could find no fault in his management, *Dan. vi. 4.* But thus was Elijah most unjustly charged with troubling Israel, the apostles with turning the world upside down, and Christ himself with perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar; and we must not think it strange, if the same game be still played. Now here,

1. The history of what was past is invidious: that within this city sedition had been moved of old time, and for that cause it was destroyed, *ver. 15.* It cannot be denied, but that there was some colour given for this suggestion by the attempts of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, to shake off the yoke of the king of Babylon, which if they had kept close to their religion and the temple they were now rebuilding, they had never come under. But it must be considered, (1.) That they were themselves and their ancestors sovereign princes, and their efforts to recover their rights, if there had not been in them the violation of an oath, for aught I know had been justifiable, and successful too, had they taken the right method, and made their peace with God first. (2.) Though these Jews and their princes had been guilty of rebellion, yet was unjust therefore to fasten this as an indefinite brand upon this city, as if that must for ever go under the name of the rebellious and bad city. The Jews in their captivity had given such instances of their good behaviour, as were sufficient to roll away that onerous reproach with any reasonable men; for they were instructed (and we have reason to hope they observed their instructions) to seek the peace of the cities where they were captives, and pray to the Lord for it, *Jer. xxix. 7.* It was therefore very unfair, yet not uncommon, for them to impute the iniquity of the fathers to the children.

2. Their information concerning what they were now doing, was grossly false in matter of fact. Very careful they were to inform the king that they had set up the walls of the city, nay, had finished them, so it is in the margin, and joined the foundations, *ver. 12.* when it was nothing so: They had only begun to build the temple, which Cyrus commanded them to do, but for the walls, there was nothing done, nor designed towards the repair of them, as appears by the posture they were in many years after, *Neh. i. 3.* all in ruins. What shall be given, and what done to these false tongues? Nay, which is worse, these false pens, sharp arrows doubtless of the mighty, and coals of juniper, *Psal. cxx. 3, 4.* If they had not been perfectly lost to all virtue and honour, they would not, and if they had not been very secure of the king's countenance, they durst not have written that to the king, which all their neighbours knew to be a notorious lie. See *Prov. xxix. 12.*

3. Their prognosticks of the consequences were altogether groundless and absurd. They are very confident, and would have the king believe it upon their word, that if this city be built, not only the Jews would pay no toll, tribute, or custom, *ver. 13.* but (since a great lie is as soon spoken as a little one) that the king would have no portion at all on this side the river, *ver. 16.* that all the countries on this side Euphrates would instantly revolt, drawn to it by their example; and if the prince in possession should connive at this, he would wrong, not only himself, but his successors, thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings. See how every line in this letter breathes both the subtilty and malice of the old serpent.

17. ¶ Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the

the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. 18. The letter which ye sent unto us, hath been plainly read before me. 19. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found, that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and *that* rebellion and sedition have been made therein. 20. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom was paid unto them. 21. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. 22. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? 23. ¶ Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force of power. 24. Then ceased the work of the house of God, which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Here is, 1. The orders which the king of Persia gave, in answer to the information sent him by the Samaritans against the Jews. He suffered himself to be imposed upon by their fraud and falshood, took no care to examine the allegations of their petition, concerning that which the Jews were now doing, but took it for granted the matter of fact was true, and was very willing to gratify them with an order of council to stay proceedings.

(1.) He consulted the records concerning Jerusalem, and found that it had indeed rebelled against the king of Babylon, and therefore that it was, as they called it, a *bad city*, ver. 19. And withal, that in times past kings had reigned there, to whom all the countries on that side the river had been tributaries, ver. 20. And therefore there was danger, that it ever they were able (which they were never likely to be) they would claim them again. Thus he saith as they said, and pretends to give a reason for it. See the hard set of princes, that must see and hear with other men's eyes and ears, and give judgment upon things as they were represented to them, and often are they represented falsely. Therefore God's judgment is always just, because he sees things as they are, and it is according to truth.

(2.) He appointed these Samaritans to stop the building of the city immediately, till further order should be given about it, ver. 21, 22. Neither they in their letter, nor he in his order, makes any mention of the temple, and the building of that, because both they knew, and he knew, that they had not only a permission, but a command from Cyrus to rebuild that, which even they had not the confidence to move for the repeal of, but only of the city, let not that be built, namely, as a city with walls and gates; whatever you do, prevent that, lest damage grow to the hurt of the kings; he would not that the crown should lose by his wearing it.

(3.) The use which the enemies of the Jews made of these orders they had fraudulently obtained; upon the receipt of them they went up in haste to Jerusalem, ver. 23. *Their feet run to evil*, Prov. i. 16. They were impatient till the builders were served with this prohibition, which they produced as their warrant to make them cease by force and power. As they abused the king in obtaining this order, by their mis-informations, so they abused him in the execution of it; for the order was only to prevent the walling of the city. But having force and power on their side, they contrived it as relating to the temple, for that was it which they had an ill-will to, and which they only wanted some colour to hinder the building of. There was indeed a general clause in the order to *cause these men to cease*, which had reference to their complaint about building the walls, but they applied it to the building of the temple. See what need we have to pray, not only for kings, but for all in authority under them, and the governors sent by them, because the *quietness* and *peaceableness* of our lives, in all godliness and honesty, depends very much upon the integrity and wisdom of inferior magistrates, as well as the supreme.

The consequence was, that the work of the house of God ceased for a time, through the power and insolence of its enemies; and so through the coldness and indifference of its friends it stood still till the second year of Darius Hystaspes, for to me it seems clear by the thread of this sacred history, that it was that Darius, ver. 24. And though now a stop was put to it by the violence of the Samaritans; yet that soon after they might have gone on by connivance, if they had had a due affection to the work, as appears by this, that before they had that express warrant from the king for doing it, chap. vi. they were reproved by the prophets for not doing it, chap. v. 1. compared with Hag. i. 1, &c. If they had taken due care to inform Cambyses with the truth of this case, perhaps he had recalled his order; but, for aught I know, some of the builders were almost as willing it should cease as the adversaries themselves were. At some times the church hath suffered more by the coldness of its friends than by the heat of its enemies; but both together commonly make church-work slow work.

C H A P. V.

We left the temple-work at a full stop, but being God's work it shall be revived, and here we have an account of the reviving of it. It was hindered by might and power, but it was set a-going again by the Spirit of the Lord of Hosts. Now here we are told how that blessed Spirit, (1.) Warmed its cool-hearted friends, and excited them to build, ver. 1, 2. (2.) Cooled its hot-headed enemies, and brought them to better tempers; for though they secretly disliked the work, as much as those in the foregoing chapter, yet, (1.) They were more mild towards the builders, ver. 3—5. (2.) They were more fair in their representation of the matter to the king, which here we have an account of, ver. 6—17.

1. **T**HEN the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. 2. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

Some reckon it was but nine years, I am willing to believe fifteen was the outside of the building of the temple stood at a stay; during which time they had an altar, and a tabernacle, which no doubt they made use of: for when we cannot do what we would, we must do what we can in the service of God, and be sure we can do no better. But the counsellors that were hired to hinder the work, chap. iv. 3. told them, and perhaps with a pretence of friendship, that the time was not come for the building of the temple, Hag. i. 2. Urging that it was long ere the time came for the building of Solomon's temple, and thus the people were made easy in their own sinned hearts, while God's house lay waste. Now here we are told how life was put into that good cause which seemed to lie dead.

1. They had two good ministers, that in God's name earnestly persuaded them to set the wheels a-going again, Haggai and Zechariah, who both began to prophesy in the second year of Darius, as appears, Hag. i. 1. Zech. i. 1. Observe, (1.) The temple of God among men is to be built by prophecy, not by secular force (that often hinders it, but seldom furthers it) but by the word of God; as the weapons of our warfare, to the instruments of our building are not carnal, but spiritual, and they are the ministers of the gospel that are the master-builders. (2.) It is the business of God's prophets to stir up God's people to that which is good, and to help them in it, to strengthen their hands, and by suitable considerations fetched from the word of God to quicken them to their duty, and encourage them in it. (3.) It is a sign God has mercy in store for a people when he raiseth up prophets among them to be their helpers in the way and work of God, their guides, overseers, and rulers.

Further observe, (1.) To whom these prophets were sent. They prophesied unto the Jews (for as to them pertained the giving of the law: so also the gift of prophecy, and therefore they are called the children of the prophets, Acts iii. 25. because they were educated under their tuition and instruction) even unto them upon them, even upon them, so it is in the original, as Ezekiel prophesied upon dry bones, that they might live, Ezek. xxxvii. 4. They prophesied against them, so Bishop Patrick, for they reproved them because they did not build the temple. The word of God, if it be received now as a testimony to us, will not be received another day as a testimony against us, and will judge us. (2.) Who sent them. They prophesied in the name, or as some read it, in the cause, or for the sake of the God of Israel; they take by commission from him, and argued from his authority over them, his interest in them, and the concern of his glory among them.

2. They had two good magistrates, that were forward and active in this work; Zerubbabel their chief prince, and Jeshua their chief priest, ver. 2. They that are in places of dignity and power, ought with their dignity to put honour upon, and with their power to put life into, every good work: thus it becometh them that precede, and them that pursue, with an exemplary care and zeal to fulfil all righteousness, and to go before in a good work. These great men thought it no disparagement to them, but a happiness to be taught and persuaded by the poor, because the Lord; and were glad of their help in reviving this good work. Read the first chapter of the prophecy at Haggai here, (for that is the best comment on these two verses) and see what great things God doth by his word, which he magnifies above all his name, and by his Spirit working with it.

3. ¶ At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? 4. Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? 5. But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter. 6. ¶ The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: 7. They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. 8. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judaea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. 9. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? 10. We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. 11. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded, and set up. 12. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. 13. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon, the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. 14. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor: 15. And said unto him, Take these vessels, go carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. 16. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem. And since that time even until now, hath it been in building, and yet

yet it is not finished. 17. Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure-house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

We have here,

1. The cognizance which their neighbours soon took of the reviving of this good work; a jealous eye it seems they had upon them, and no sooner did the Spirit of God stir up the friends of the temple to appear for it, but the evil Spirit stirred up its enemies to appear against it. While the people built and ce led their own houses, their enemies gave them no molestation, Hag. i. 4. though the king's order was to put a stop to the building of the city, chap. iv. 21. But when they fell to work again at the temple, then the alarm is taken, and all heads are at work to hinder it, ver. 3, 4. The adversaries are here named, Tatnai and Shethar-boznai; the governors we read of, chap. iv. were, it is probable, displaced at the beginning of this reign, as is usual; it is the policy of princes often to change their deputies, pro-consuls, and rulers of provinces. These, though real enemies to the building of the temple, were men of better temper than the other, and that made some conscience of telling truth; if *all men have not faith*, 2 Thess. iii. 2. it is well some have, and a sense of honour. The church's enemies are not all alike wicked and unreasonable. The historian begins to relate what passed between the builders and those inquisitors, ver. 3. 4. but breaks off his account, referring himself to the ensuing copy of the letter they sent to the king, where the same doth and may appear more fully and at large, which he began to abridge, ver. 4. or make an extract out of, but upon second thoughts inserted the whole.

2. The care which the divine providence took of this good work, ver. 5. *The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews*, who were active in the work, so that their enemies could not cause them to cease, as they would have done, till the matter came to Darius. They desired they would only cease, till they had instructions from the king about it. But they would not so much as yield them that, for *the eye of God was upon them*, even their God. And, (1.) That baffled their enemies, insatuated and enfeebled them; and protected the builders from their malicious designs. While we are employed in God's work, we are taken under his special protection, his eye is upon us for good, seven eyes upon one stone in his temple, see Zech. iii. 9.—iv. 10. (2.) That quickened them; the elders of the Jews saw *the eye of God upon them*, to observe what they did, and own them in what they did well, and then they had courage enough to face their enemies, and to go on vigorously with their work, maugre all the opposition they met with. Our eye upon God observing his eye upon us, will keep us to our duty, and encourage us in it when the difficulties are never so discouraging.

3. The account they sent to the king of this matter. In which we may observe,

1. How fully the elders of the Jews gave the Samaritans an account of their proceedings. They finding them both busy, and prosperous, that all hands were at work to run up this building, and that it went fast on, put this question to them. By what authority they did these things? and who gave them that authority? who set them to work, and whether they had that which would bear them out? To this they answered, that they had sufficient warrant to do what they did; for, (1.) *We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth*; the God we worship is not a local deity, and therefore we cannot be charged with making a faction, or setting up a sect, in building this temple to his honour. But we pay our homage to a God on whom the whole creation depends, and therefore ought to be protected and assisted by all, and hindered by none. It is the wisdom, as well as duty of kings, to countenance the servants of the God of heaven. (2.) We have a prescription to this house; it was built for the honour of our God by Solomon many ages ago. It is no novel invention of our own, we are but *raising the foundations of many generations*, Isa. v. 8—12. (3.) It was to punish us for our sins, that we were for a time put out of the possession of this house; not because the gods of the nations had prevailed against our God, but because we had provoked him, ver. 12. for which he delivered us and our temple into the hands of the king of Babylon, but never intended thereby to put a final period to our religion. We were only suspended for a time, not deprived for ever. (4.) We have the royal decree of Cyrus, to justify us and bear us out in what we do. He not only permitted and allowed us, but charged and commanded us to build this house, ver. 13. and to build it in its place, ver. 15. the same place where it had stood before. And this not only in compassion to the Jews, but in veneration of their God, saying, *He is the God*. He also delivered the vessels of the temple, to one whom he intrusted to see them restored to their ancient place and use, ver. 14. And they had these to shew in confirmation of what they alledged. (5.) The building was begun according to this order, as soon as ever we were returned, so that we have not forfeited the benefit of the order, for want of pursuing it in times, still it has been in building, but because we have met with opposition, it is not finished. But observe, they mention not the fallhood and malice of the former governors, nor make any complaint of that, though they had cause enough, to teach us not to render bitterness for bitterness, nor the most just reproach, or not for that which is most unjust, but to think it enough if we can obtain fair treatment for the future, without an invidious repetition of former injuries, ver. 16. This is the account they give of their proceedings, not asking what authority they had to examine them, or upbraiding them with their idolatry and superstitions, and medley religion. Let us learn hence, with meekness and fear to *give a reason of the hope that is in us*, 1 Pet. iii. 15. rightly to understand, and then readily to declare what we do in God's service, and why we do it.

2. How fairly the Samaritans represented this to the king. (1.) They call the temple at Jerusalem, *the house of the great God*, ver. 8. for though the Samaritans, as it should seem, had yet gods many, and lords many, they owned the God of Israel to be the *great God*, that is above all gods, it is the house of the *great God*, and therefore we dare not oppose the building of it without orders from thee. (2.) They tell him truly what was done, not as their predecessors did, that they were fortifying the city, as if they intended war, but only rearing the temple, as those that intended worship, ver. 8. (3.) They fully represent their plea, tell him what they had to say for themselves, and are willing the cause should be set in a true light. And then lastly, They leave it to the king to consult the records, whether Cyrus had indeed made such a decree, and then to give directions as he should think fit, ver. 17. We have reason to think, if Artaxerxes in the foregoing chapter had had the Jews' cause as fairly represented to him, as it was here to Darius, he would not have ordered the work to be hindered. God's people could not be persecuted, if they were not belied; could not be baited, if they were not dressed up in bears' skins. Let but the cause of God and truth be fairly stated, and fairly heard, and it will keep its ground.

C H A P. VI.

How solemnly the foundation of the temple was laid, we read chap. iii. How slowly the building went on, and with how much difficulty, we found chap. iv. and v. but how gloriously the top stone was at length brought forth with shoutings, we find in this chapter: and even we at this distance of time, when we read of it, may cry, Grace, grace to it. As for God, his work is perfect; it may be slow work, but it will be sure work. We have here, (1.) A recital of the decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple, ver. 1—5. (2.) The enforcing of that decree by a new order from Darius for the perfecting of that work, ver. 6—12. (3.) The finishing of it thereupon, ver. 13—15. (4.) The solemn dedication of it when it was built, ver. 16—18. And the handfelling of it (as I may say) with the celebration of the passover, ver. 19—22. And now we may say, that in Judah and Jerusalem things went well, very well.

1. **T**HEN Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. 2. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: 3. In the first year of Cyrus the king, the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid, the height three score cubits, and the breadth thereof three score cubits. 4. With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expences be given out of the king's house. 5. And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, everyone to his place, and place them in the house of God. 6. Now therefore Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: 7. Let the work of this house of God alone, let the governor of the Jews, and the elders of the Jews, build this house of God in his place. 8. Moreover, I make a decree, what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. 9. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail. 10. That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and of his sons. 11. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon, and let his house be made a dunghill for this. 12. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there, destroy all kings and people that shall put to their hand, to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem: I Darius have made a decree, let it be done with speed.

We have here,

1. The decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple repeated. To this the Samaritans referred themselves, because the Jews pleaded it, and perhaps hoped it would not be found, and then their plea would be overruled, and a stop put to their work. Search was ordered to be made for it among the records, for it seems the tribes had not taken care to provide themselves with an authentic copy of it, which might have stood them in good stead, but they must appeal to the original. It was looked for in Babylon, ver. 1. where Cyrus then was when he signed it. But when it was not found there, Darius did not make that a pretence to conclude, that therefore there was no such decree, and thereupon to give judgment against the Jews, but it is probable, having himself heard for certain that such a decree was made, he ordered the rolls in other places to be searched, and at length it was found at Achmetha, in the province of the Medes, ver. 2. Perhaps some that durst not destroy it, yet hid it there out of ill-will to the Jews, that they might lose the benefit of it. But providence so ordered that it came to light; and it is here inserted, ver. 3, 4, 5. (1.) Here is a warrant for the building of the temple, *let the house of God at Jerusalem, yea, let that house be builded*. So it may be read, within such and such dimensions, and with such and such materials. (2.) A warrant for the taking of the expences of the building out of the king's revenue, ver. 4. We do not find that they had received what was here ordered them; the face of things at court being soon changed. (3.) A warrant for the restoring of the vessels and utensils of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away, ver. 5. with order that the priests, the Lord's ministers, should return them each to their place in the house of God.

2. The confirmation of it by a decree of Darius grounded upon it, and in pursuance of it. By which,

1. He forbids his officers to do any thing in opposition to the building of the temple. The manner of expression intimates, that he knew they had a mind to hinder it, for (saith he) *be ye far from thence*, ver. 6. *Let the work*

of this house of God alone, ver. 7. Thus was the wrath of the enemy made to praise God, and the remainder thereof did he restrain.

2. He orders them out of his own revenue to assist the builders with money. (1.) For carrying on the building, ver. 8. Herein he pursues the example of Cyrus, ver. 4. (2.) For maintaining the fire fires there when it was built, ver. 9. He orders they should be supplied with every thing they wanted, both for burnt-offerings and meat-offerings. He was content it should be a rent-charge upon his revenue, and orders it should be paid every day, and this without fail, that they may offer sacrifices and prayers with them (for the patriarchs when they offered sacrifice, called on the name of the Lord; so did Samuel, Elijah, and others) for the life, that is, the happiness and prosperity of the king and his sons, ver. 10. See here how he gives honour, (1.) To Israel's God, whom he calls once and again the God of heaven. (2.) To his ministers, in ordering his commissioners to give out supplies for the temple-service, at the appointment of the priests; they that thought to have controlled them, now must be in this matter at their command. It was a new thing for God's priests to have such an interest in the public money. (3.) To prayer, that they may pray for the life of the king. He knew they were a praying people, and had heard that God was nigh to them in all that which they called upon him for. He was sensible he needed their prayers, and might receive benefit by them; and was therefore kind to them, that he might have an interest in their prayers. It is the duty of God's people, to pray for those that are in authority over them, not only for the good and gentle, but also for the froward; but they are particularly bound in gratitude to pray for their protectors and benefactors: and it is the wisdom of princes to desire their prayers, and to engage them. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us.

3. He enforceth his decree with a penalty, ver. 11. Let none either oppose the work and service of the temple, or withhold the support granted to it by the crown, upon pain of death: If any alter this decree, let him be hanged before his own door, as we say, hanged upon a beam of his own house, and as an execrable man, let his house be made a dunghill.

4. He entails a divine curse upon all those kings and people that should ever have any hand in the destruction of this house, ver. 12. what he could not do himself for the protection of the temple, he desires that God, to whom vengeance belongs, would do. This speaks him zealous in the cause; and though this temple was at length most justly destroyed by the righteous hand of God, yet perhaps the Romans, who were the instruments of that destruction, felt the effects of this curse, for that empire sensibly declined ever after.

Now from all this we learn, (1.) That the heart of kings is in the hand of God, and he turns it which way he ever he pleases; what they are he makes them to be, for he is, King of kings. (2.) That when God's time is come for the accomplishing of his gracious purposes concerning his church, he will raise up instruments to do it, from whom such good service was not expected. The earth sometimes helps the corn, Rev. xii. 16 and those are made use of for the defence of religion that have little religion themselves. (3.) That what is intended for the prejudice of the church, has often, by the over-ruling providence of God, been made serviceable to it, Phil. i. 12. The enemies of the Jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to suppress them, but instead of that got an order to supply them. Thus out of the eater comes forth meat. The apocryphal Esdras (or Ezra) Book I. chap. iii. and iv. gives another account of this decree in favour of the Jews, that Darius had vowed if ever he came to the kingdom he would build the temple at Jerusalem, and that Zerubbabel, who was one of his attendants, (whereas it is plain here, he was now at Jerusalem,) for making an ingenious discourse before him, on that subject [Great is the truth and will prevail], was bid to ask what recompence he would, and asked only for this order in pursuance of the king's vow.

13. ¶ Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shether-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily. 14. And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo; and they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. 16. ¶ And the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17. And offered at the dedication of this house of God, an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem: as it is written in the book of Moses. 19. And the children of the captivity kept the pass-over upon the fourteenth day of the first month. 20. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the pass-over for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21. and the children of Israel which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them, from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel did eat, 22. And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Here we have,

1. The Jews' enemies made their friends: When they received this order from the king, they came with as much haste to encourage and assist the work, as their predecessors had put a stop to it, chap. iv. 23. What the No. LXVI.

king ordered they did, and because they would not be thought to do it with reluctance, they did it speedily, ver. 13. The king's moderation made them, contrary to their own inclination, moderate too.

2. The building of the temple carried on and finished in a little time, ver. 14, 15. Now the elders of the Jews builded with cheerfulness. For ought I know, the elders themselves laboured at it with their own hands, and they did it with a disposition to their edification, but an encouragement to the other workmen. (1.) They found themselves bound to it by the commandment of the God of Israel, who had given them power, that they might use it in his service. (2.) They found themselves thence now, it by the commandment of the heathen kings, Cyrus formerly, Darius now, and Artaxerxes some time after. Can the elders of the Jews be remiss in this good work, when these foreign princes appear so warm in it? Shall native Israelites grudge their pains and care about this building, when strangers grudge not to be at the expence of it? (3.) They found themselves encouraged in it by the prophesying of Haggai and Zechariah, who, it is likely, represented to them (as Bishop Patrick suggests) the wonderful goodness of God in inclining the heart of the king of Persia to favour them thus. And now the work went on so prosperously, that in four years time it was brought to perfection. As for God, his work is perfect. The gospel church, that spiritual temple, is long in the building, but it will be finished at last, when the mystical body is completed. Every believer is a living temple, building up himself in his most holy faith; much opposition is given to this work by Satan and our own corruptions; we trifle and proceed in it with many stops and pauses, but he that has begun the good work will see it prosecuted, and will bring forth judgment unto victory. Spirits of just men will make perfect.

3. The dedication of the temple. When it was built, being designed only for sacred uses, now they showed by an example how it should be used, which (saith Bishop Patrick) is the proper sense of the word dedicate. They entered upon it with solemnity, and probably with a public declaration of the separating of it from common uses, and the surrender of it to the honour of God, to be employed in his worship. (1.) The persons employed in this service were not only the priests and Levites who officiated, but the children of Israel, some of each of the twelve tribes, though Judah and Benjamin were the chief, and the rest of the children of the captivity or transportation; which intimates, that there were many besides the children of Israel, of other nations, who came and dwelt with them, and became profelytes to their religion; and as we read, I am the remnant of the children of the captivity, and then, we may suppose, notice is hereby taken of their mean and afflicted condition, because the consideration of that helped to make them devout and serious in this and other religious exercises. A sad change! The children of Israel are become children of the captivity, and there appears but a remnant of them neither; according to that prediction, Isa. vii. 2. Shear-jashub, the remnant shall return. (2.) The sacrifices that were offered upon this occasion, were bullocks, rams, and lambs, ver. 17. for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, nothing for number in comparison with what had been offered at the dedication of Solomon's temple, but being according to their present ability, it was accepted: for after a great trial of affliction the abundance of wisdom, and the deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality, 2 Cor. viii. 2. These hundreds were more to them, than Solomon's thousands were to him. But, besides these, they offered twelve he-goats for sin-offerings, one for every tribe, to make atonement for their sins, which they looked upon as necessary, in order to the acceptance of their services. Thus by getting iniquity taken away, they could free themselves from that which had been the sting of their late troubles, and, if not removed, would be a worm at the root of their present comforts. (3.) This service was performed with joy; they were all glad to see the temple built, and the concerns of it in so good a posture. Let us learn to welcome holy ordinances with joy, and attend on them with pleasure. Serve the Lord with gladness. Whatever we dedicate to God, let it be done with joy, that he will please to accept it. (4.) When they dedicated the house, they settled the household; small comfort could they have in the temple, without the temple service, and therefore they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, ver. 18. Having set up the worship of God in this dedication, they took care to keep it up, and made the book of Moses their rule, to which they had an eye in this establishment. Though the temple-service could not now be performed with so much pomp and plenty as formerly, because of their poverty, yet perhaps it was performed with as much purity, and close adherence to the divine institution as ever, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the bray of holiness.

4. The celebration of the pass-over in the new erected temple. Now they were newly delivered out of their bondage in Babel, it was seasonable to commemorate their deliverance out of their bondage in Egypt. For mercies should put us in mind of former mercies. We may suppose they had kept the pass-over after a sort every year since their return, for they had an altar and a tabernacle. But they were liable to frequent disturbances from their enemies, were strained for room, and had not conveniences about them, so that they could not do it with due solemnity till the temple was built, and now they made a joyful festival of it, it falling out in the next month after the temple was finished and dedicated, ver. 19.

Notice is here taken, (1.) Of the purity of the priests and Levites that kill the pass-over, ver. 20. In Hezekiah's time, they were many of them under blame for not purifying themselves. But now it is observed to their praise, that they were purified together as one man, to the word is, they were unanimous both in their relations and in their endeavours, to make and keep themselves ceremonially clean for this solemnity; they joined together in their preparations, that they might help one another, so that all of them were pure to a man: The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministrations, to such their unity. (2.) Of the profelytes that communicated with them in this ordinance. All such as had separated themselves unto them, had left their country and the superstitions of it, and cast in their lot with the Israel of God, and had turned from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, both their idolatries and their immoralities, to seek the Lord God of Israel as their God, did eat the pass-over. See how the profelytes, the converts are described; they separate themselves from the filthiness of sin and fellowship with sinners, join themselves to the Israel of God in conformity and communion, and set themselves to seek the God of Israel; and those that do so in sincerity, though strangers and foreigners, are welcome to eat of the gospel-feast, as fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God. (3.) Of the great pleasure and satisfaction wherewith they kept the feast of unleavened bread, ver. 22. the Lord had made them joyful, had given them both cause to rejoice and hearts to rejoice. It was now about twenty years since the foundation of this temple was laid, and we may suppose the old men that then wept at the remembrance of the first temple were most of them dead by this time, so that now there was no tears mingled with their joys. Those that are upon good grounds joyful have therefore reason to be thankful, because it is God that makes them to rejoice. He is the fountain whence all the streams of our joy flow. God has promised to all those who take hold of his covenant, that he will make them joyful in his house of prayer. The particular occasion they had for joy at this time was, that God had turned the heart of the emperor to them to strengthen their hands. If those

that have been, or we feared would have been, against us prove to be for us, we may rejoice in it as a token for good, that *our ways please the Lord*, Prov. xvi. 7. and he must have the glory of it.

C H A P. VII.

Ezra's previous name saluted us at first in the title of the book, but in the history we have not met with it, till this chapter introduceth him into public action in another reign, that of Artaxerxes. Zerubbabel and Jeshua, we will suppose by this time to be grown old, if not gone off; nor hear we any more of Haggai and Zechariah; they have finished their testimony: What shall become of the cause of God, and Israel, when these useful instruments are laid aside? Trust God, who has the residue of the Spirit, to raise up others in their room. Ezra here, and Nehemiah in the next book, are as serviceable in their days, as those were in theirs. Here is, (1.) An account in general of Ezra himself, and of his expedition to Jerusalem for the public good, ver. 1—10. (2.) A copy of the commission which Artaxerxes gave him, ver. 11—26. (3.) His thankfulness to God for it, ver. 27, 28. The next chapter will give us a more particular narrative of his associates, his journey, and arrival at Jerusalem.

1. **N**OW after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, 2. The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3. The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4. The son of Zechariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5. The son of Abihua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest: 6. This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him. 7. And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. 8. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month, came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. 10. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

Here is, 1. Ezra's pedigree. He was one of the sons of Aaron, a priest; him God chose to be an instrument of good to Israel, that he might put honour upon the priesthood, the glory of which had been much eclipsed by the captivity. He is said to be the son of Seraiah, that Seraiah, as is supposed, whom the king of Babylon put to death when he sacked Jerusalem, 2 Kings xxv. 18—21. If we take the shortest computation, it was seventy-five years since Seraiah died, and many reckoned it much longer, and because we will suppose Ezra called out in the prime of his time to public service, do therefore think that Seraiah was not his immediate parent, but his grandfather or great-grandfather, but he was the first eminent person that occurred in his genealogy upwards, which is carried up here as high as Aaron, but leaving out many for brevity sake, which may be supplied from 1 Chron. vi. 4, &c. He was younger brother, or his father was Jozadak, the father of Jeshua, so that he was not high-priest, but nearly allied to the high-priest.

2. His character; though of the younger house, his personal qualifications made him very eminent.

1. He was a man of great learning. A scribe, a ready scribe in the law of Moses, ver. 6. He was very much conversant with the scriptures, especially the writings of Moses, had the words ready, and was well acquainted with the sense and meaning of them; it is to be feared, learning run low among the Jews in Babylon; but Ezra was instrumental to revive it. The Jews say, he collected and collated all the copies of the law he could find out, and published an accurate edition of it, with all the prophetic books, historical and poetical, that were given by divine inspiration, and so made up the canon of the Old Testament, with the addition of the prophecies and histories of his own time, which, if he were raised up of God, and spirited to do, all generations have reason to call him blessed, and to bless God for him. God sent to the Jews prophets and scribes, Matt. xxiii. 34. Ezra went under the latter denomination; now prophecy was about to cease, it was time to promote scripture-knowledge, pursuant to the counsel of God by the last of the prophets, Mal. iv. 4. Remember the law of Moses. Gospel ministers are called *Scribes instructed to the kingdom of heaven*, Matt. xiii. 52. New Testament scribes. It was pity such a worthy name as this should be worn as it was, in the degenerate ages of the Jewish church, by men that were professed enemies to Christ and his gospel. *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees*, who were learned in the letter of the law, but strangers to the spirit of it.

2. He was a man of great piety and holy zeal, ver. 10. He had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, &c. (1.) That which he chose for his study was the law of the Lord. The Chaldeans, among whom he was born and bred, were famed for literature, especially the study of the stars, to which, being a bookish man, we may suppose Ezra was tempted to apply himself, but he got over the temptation, the law of his God was more to him than all the writings of their magicians and astrologers, which he knew enough of with good reason to despise them. (2.) He sought the law of the Lord, that is, he made it his business to inquire into it; searched the scriptures, and sought the knowledge of God, and his mind and will in the scriptures, which is to be found there, but not without seeking. (3.) He made conscience of doing according to it; set it before him as his rule, formed his sentiments and temper by it, and managed himself in his whole conversation according to it. This use we must make of our knowledge of the scriptures, for happy are we, if we do what we know of the will of God. (4.) He set himself to teach Israel the statutes and judgments of that law. What he knew, he was willing to communicate for the good of others, for

the ministration of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. But observe the method; he first learned and then taught; sought the law of the Lord, and so laid up a good treasure, and then instructed others, and laid out what he had laid up. He also first did and then taught, practised the commandments himself, and then directed others in the practice of them; thus his example confirmed his doctrine. (5.) He prepared his heart to do all this; or fixed his heart. He took pains in his studies, and thoroughly furnished himself for what he designed, and then put on resolution to proceed and persevere in them, and thus he became a ready scribe. Moses in Egypt, Ezra in Babylon, and both in captivity, were wonderfully fitted for eminent services to the church.

3. His expedition to Jerusalem for the good of his country. He went up from Babylon, ver. 6. and in four months time came to Jerusalem, ver. 8. It was strange such a man as he staid so long in Babylon, after his brethren were gone up; but God sent him not thither till he had work for him to do there; and none went but those whose spirits God raised to go up. Some think this Artaxerxes was the same with that Darius, whose decree we had chap. vi. and that Ezra came the very year after the temple was finished, that was the sixth year, this the seventh, ver. 8. So Dr. Lightfoot; my worthy and learned friend lately deceased, Mr. Tallents, in his chronological tables, placeth it about fifty-seven years after the finishing of the temple; others further on. I have only to observe, (1.) How kind the king was to him, he granted him all his request, whatever he desired, to put him into a capacity to serve his country. (2.) How kind his people were to him; when he went, many more went with him, because they desired not to stay in Babylon when he was gone thence, and because they would venture to dwell in Jerusalem, when he was gone thither. (3.) How kind his God was to him; he obtained this favour from his king and country, by the good hand of the Lord that was upon him, ver. 6—9. Note, Every creature is that to us that God makes it to be; and from him our judgment proceeds; as the events that shall be we must see in God's hand, so the events that are we must see God's hand in, and acknowledge him with thankfulness, when we have reason to call it his good hand.

11. ¶ Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. 12. Artaxerxes, king of kings, Unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. 13. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites in my realm, which are minded of their own free will to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. 14. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand: 15. And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem. 16. And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the free-will offerings of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God, which is in Jerusalem: 17. That thou mayest buy speedily with this money, bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat-offerings, and their drink-offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God, which is in Jerusalem. 18. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and gold, and do after the will of your God. 19. The vessels also that are given thee, for the service of the house of thy God, these deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. 20. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure-house. 21. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily; 22. Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much: 23. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? 24. Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom upon them. 25. And thou Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, let magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. 26. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

We have here the commission which the Persian emperor granted to Ezra, giving him authority to act for the good of the Jews; and it is very ample and full, and beyond what could be expected. The commission runs, we suppose, in the usual form. Artaxerxes, king of kings, that is too high a title for any mortal man to assume; he was indeed king of some kings, but to speak as if he were king of all kings, is to usurp his prerogative who hath all power both in heaven and in earth. He sends greeting to his trusty and well-

well beloved Ezra, whom he calls a *scribe of the law of the God of heaven*, ver. 12, a title which (it seems by this) Ezra valued himself by, and desired no other, no not when he was advanced to the preeminent dignity. He reckoned it more his honour to be a *scribe of God's law*, than to be a peer or prince of the empire: Let us observe the articles of this commission;

1. He gives Ezra leave to go up to Jerusalem, and as many of his countrymen as pleased to go up with him, ver. 13. He and they were captives, and therefore they would not quit his dominions without his royal licence.

2. He gives them authority to inquire into the affairs of Judah and Jerusalem, ver. 14. The rule of his inquiry was to be *the law of his God which was in his hand*; whether the Jews in their religion had and did according to that law; whether the temple was built, the priesthood settled, and the sacrifices offered conformable to the divine appointment; if upon inquiry he found any thing amiss, he must see to get it amended, like Titus in Crete, must *set in order the things that were wanting*, Tit. i. 5. Thus is God's law magnified and made honourable, and thus are the Jews restored to their ancient privilege of governing themselves by that law, and are no longer under *the statutes that were not good*, the statutes of their oppressors, Ezek. xx. 25.

(3.) He entrusts him with the money that was freely given by the king himself and his counsellors, and collected among his subjects for the service of the house of God, ver. 15, 16. Let this be taken notice of, (1.) To the honour of God, as the one only living and true God, for even those that worshipped other gods, were so convinced of the sovereignty of the God of Israel, that they were willing to be at charge to recommend themselves to his favour. See *Psal. xlv. 12—lxviii. 29*. (2.) To the praise of this heathen king; that he ordered the God of Israel, though his worshippers were a detestable handful of poor men, that were not able to bear the charges of their own religion, and were now his vassals; and that though he was not wrought upon to quit his own superstitions, yet he protected and encouraged the Jews in their religion, and did not only say, *Be ye warmed, and be ye filled*, but gave them such things as they needed. (3.) To the reproach of the memory of the wicked kings of Judah; they that had been trained up in the knowledge and worship of the God of Israel, and had his law and his prophets, often plundered and impoverished the temple, but here a heathen prince enricheth it. Thus afterwards the gospel was rejected by the Jews, but welcomed by the Gentiles. See *Rom. xi. 11*. *Through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles*. *Act. xiii. 46*.

Ezra is intrusted, (1.) To receive this money, and to carry it to Jerusalem, for he was a man of known integrity, whom they could confide in, that he would not convert that, nor the least part of it, to his own use, which was given to the public. We find St. Paul going to Jerusalem upon such an errand, *to bring alms to his nation and offerings*, *Act. xxiv. 17*. (2.) To lay out this money in the best manner; in sacrifices to be offered upon the altar of God, ver. 17, and in whatever else he or his brethren thought fit, ver. 18, with this limitation only, that it be *after the will of your God*, which they were better acquainted with than he was. Let the will of our God be always our rule in our expences, and particularly in what we lay out for his service. God's work must always be done according to his will. Besides money he had vessels also given him for the service of the temple, ver. 19. Cyrus restored what of right belonged to the temple; but these were given over and above: Thus it *receiveth its own with usury*; these he must deliver before the God of Jerusalem, as intended for his honour, there where he had put his name.

4. He draws him a bill, or warrant rather, upon the treasures on that side the river, requiring them to furnish him with what he had occasion for out of the king's revenues, and place it to the king's account, ver. 20, 21, 22. This was considerably done, for Ezra, being yet to enquire into the state of things, knew not what he should have occasion for, and was modest in his demands; it was also kindly done, and evidenceth a very great affection to the temple and a great confidence in Ezra. It is the interest of princes, and great men to use their wealth and power in the support and encouragement of religion: And what else are great revenues good for, but that they enable men to do much good of this kind, if they have but hearts to do it?

5. He chargeth him that nothing should be wanting that was requisite to be done in or about the temple, for the honour of the God of Israel. Observe in this charge, ver. 23. How honourably he speaks of God, he had called him before the God of Jerusalem; but here, lest it should be thought he looked upon him as a local deity, he calls him twice, with great veneration, the God of heaven: How strictly he eyes the word and law of God, which, it is likely, he had read and admired; whatsoever is *commanded by your God* (whose institutions, though he wrote himself *King of kings*, he would not presume in the iota or tittle to alter or add to) let it be done, let it be diligently done, with care and speed. And how solicitously he deprecates the wrath of God, *why should there be wrath against the realm?* The neglect and contempt of religion brings the judgments of God upon kings and kingdoms, and the likeliest expedient to turn away his wrath, when it is ready to break out against a people, is to support and encourage religion; would we secure our peace and prosperity, let us take care that the cause of God be not starved.

6. He dischargeth all the ministers of the temple from paying taxes to the government, from the greatest of the priests to the least of the Nethinims, it shall not be lawful for the king's officers to impose that toll, tribute, or custom upon them, which other the king's subjects paid, ver. 24. This put a great honour upon them, as free denizens of the empire, and would gain them respect as favourites of the crown; and it gave them liberty to attend their ministry with more cheerfulness and freedom. We suppose it was only what they needed for themselves and their families, and the maintenance of their ministry, that was hereby allowed to come to them custom-free; if any of them should take occasion, from this privilege, to meddle in trade and merchandise, they justly lost the benefit of it.

7. He impowers Ezra to nominate and appoint judges and magistrates for all the Jews on that side the river, ver. 25, 26. It was a great favour to the Jews to have such nobles of themselves, and especially to have them of Ezra's nomination. (1.) All that *knew the law of Ezra's God*, i. e. all that professed the Jewish religion were to be under the jurisdiction of these judges, which intimates, that they were exempt from the jurisdiction of the heathen magistrates. (2.) These judges were allowed and encouraged to make proselytes, let them *teach the laws of God to those that do not know them*. Though he would not turn Jew himself, he cared not how many of his subjects did. (3.) They are authorized to enforce the judgments they gave, and the orders they made conformable to the law of God, (which was hereby made the law of the king) with severe penalties, imprisonment, banishment, fine, or death, according as their law directed. They are not allowed to make new laws, but must see the laws of God duly executed; and therefore they are intrusted with the sword, that they may be a terror to evil doers. What could Jehoiaphat, or Hezekiah, or David himself, as king, have done more for the honour of God and the furtherance of religion?

27. ¶ Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD, which is in Jeru-

salem; 28. And hath extended mercy unto me, before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes, and I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel, chief men to go up with me.

Ezra cannot proceed in his story, without inserting his thankful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him and his people in this matter. As soon as he has concluded the king's commission, instead of subjoining *God save the king*, though that had been proper enough; he adds, *Blessed be the Lord*, for we must in every thing give thanks, and whatever occurrences please us, we must own God's hand in them, and praise his name. Two things Ezra blessed God for.

1. For his commission. We suppose he kissed the king's hand for it, but that was not all, *Blessed be God* (saith he) *that put such a thing as this into the king's heart*. God can put things into men's hearts, which would not arise there of themselves, and into their heads too, both by his providence and by his grace, in things pertaining both to life and godliness. If any good appear to be in our own hearts, or in the hearts of others, we must own it was God that put it there, and ble's him for it; for it is he that *worketh in us both to will and to do that which was good*. When princes and magistrates act for the suppression of vice, and the encouragement of religion, we must thank God that put it into their hearts to do so, as much as if they had granted us some particular favour. When God's house was built, Ezra rejoiced in what was done to beautify it. We read not of any orders given to paint or gild it, or garnish it with precious stones, but to be sure that the ordinances of God were duly administered there constantly, and carefully and exactly according to the institution, and that was indeed the beautifying of the temple.

2. For the encouragement he had to act in pursuance of his commission, ver. 28. He has extended mercy to me. The king, in the honour he did him, we may suppose, had an eye to his merits, and preferred him because he looked upon him to be a very sensible ingenious man: but he himself ascribes it purely to God's mercy, that it was that recommended him to the favour of his prince. Ezra himself was a man of courage, yet he attributes his encouragement, not to his own heart, but to God's hand, I was strengthened to undertake the service, *at the hand of the Lord my God was upon me*, to direct and support me; if God gives us his hand, we are bold and cheerful; if he withdraw it, we are weak as water. Whatever service we are enabled to do for God and our generation, God must have all the glory of it. Strength for it is derived from him, and therefore the praise of it must be given to him.

C H A P. VIII.

This chapter gives us a more particular narrative of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem, which we had a general account of in the foregoing chapter. (1.) The company that went up with him, ver. 1—20.

(2.) The solemn fast which he kept with his company, to implore God's presence with them in this journey, ver. 21—23. (3.) The care he took of the treasure he had with him, and the charge he gave the priest concerning it, to whose custody he committed it, ver. 24—30. (4.) The care God took of him and his company in the way, ver. 31. (5.) Their safe arrival at Jerusalem, where they delivered their treasure to the priests, ver. 33, 34. Their commissions to the king's lieutenants, ver. 36. Offered sacrifices to God, ver. 35. and then applied themselves to their business.

1. THESE are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. 2. Of the sons of Phinehas; Gerthom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush. 3. Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharoah; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males, an hundred and fifty. 4. Of the sons of Palath-moab; Elihoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males. 5. Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel; and with him three hundred males. 6. Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. 7. And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. 8. And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males. 9. Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. 10. And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males. 11. And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. 12. And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males. 13. And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jciel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males. 14. And of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males. 15. ¶ And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. 16. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Aziel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief, at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his

his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. 18. And by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19. And Hathabiah, and with him Jethaiah of the sons of Merai, his brethren and their sons, twenty; 20. Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

Ezra having received his commission from the king, beats for volunteers, as it were, sets up an ensign to assemble the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah, *Ista. xi. 12.* whoever of the sons of Zion, that dwell with the daughters of Babylon, is disposed to go to Jerusalem, now the temple there is finished, and the temple-service set a-going, now is their time: now one would think that under such a leader, with such encouragements, all the Jews should at length have shaken themselves from their dust, and loosed the bands off their neck, according to that call, *Ista. lii. 1, 2.* I wonder how any of them could read that chapter, and yet stay behind. But multitudes did that loved their ease better than their religion, thought themselves well where they were, and either believed not that Jerusalem would better their condition, or durst not go thither through any difficulties. But here we are told,

1. That some offered themselves willingly to go with Ezra. The heads of the several families are here named for their honours, and the numbers of the males each brought in, amounting in all to one thousand four hundred ninety and six. Two priests are named, *ver. 2.* and one of the sons of David, but it should seem they came without their families, probably intending to see how they liked Jerusalem, and then either to send for their families, or return to them as they saw cause. Several of their families, or clans, here named we had before, *chap. ii.* Then some went up from them, now more, as God inclined their hearts; some were called into the vineyard at the third hour, others not until the eleven hour, even those were not rejected. But here we read of *the last sons of Benjamin*, *ver. 13.* which some understand to their dispraise, that they were the last that lifted themselves under Ezra; I rather understand it to their honour, that now all the sons of that family returned, and none stand behind.

2. That what Levites went into this company were in a manner pressed into the service. Ezra appointed a general rendezvous of all his company, at a certain place upon New-year's day, the first day of the first month, *chap. vii. 9.* then and there he took a view of them, and mustered them, and (which was strange) found there none of the sons of Levi, *ver. 17.* Some priests there were, but none others, that were Levites, where was the spirit of that sacred tribe? Ezra a priest, like Moses, proclaims, *who is on the Lord's side?* and they, unlike to Levi, think, and desire to abide among the sojourners to hear the blessings of the flock; synagogues we suppose they had in Babylon, in which they prayed and preached, and kept sabbaths, and when they could not have better, they had reason to be thankful for them: but now the temple at Jerusalem was opened, to the service of which they were ordained, they ought to have preferred the gates of Zion before all those synagogues; it is upon record here to their reproach, but tell it not in Gath. Ezra, when he observed that he had no Levites in his retinue, was much at a loss: he had money enough for the service of the temple, but wanted men. The king and princes had more than done their part, but the sons of Levi had not half done theirs. Eleven men, chief men, and men of understanding, he chooses out of his company, to be employed for the filling up of this lamentable vacancy. And here we are told,

1. How well they were sent, that Ezra sent them to a proper place, where there was a college of Levites, the place Casiphia, probably a street or square in Babylon allowed for that purpose; (Silver-street, one may call it, for Ceph signifies silver) he sent them to a proper person, to Iddo, the chief president of the college, not to urge him to come himself, we will suppose him to be old and unfit for such a remove, but some of the juniors, ministers for the house of God, *ver. 17.* The furnishing of God's house with good ministers is a good work, and which will redound to the comfort and credit of all that have a hand in it.

2. How well they sped; they did not return without their errand, but though their warning was short, they brought about 40 Levites to attend Ezra, Sherebiah, noted for a very intelligent man, and eighteen with him, *ver. 18.* Hathabiah and Jethaiah, and twenty with them, *ver. 19.* By this it appears they were not averse to go, but were slothful and mindless, and only wanted to be called upon and excited to go? What a pity it is that good men should omit a good work, merely for want of being spoken to: pity they should need it, and if they do, pity they should want it. Of the Nethinims, the servants of the sacred college, the species infima of the temple ministers, more appear forward to go than of the Levites themselves: of them two hundred and twenty upon this hasty summons lifted themselves, and had the honour to be expressed by name in Ezra's muster-roll, *ver. 20.* Thus (saith Ezra) were we furnished with Levites, by the good hand of God upon us. If where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well supplied, let God have the glory, and his good hand, qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them.

21. ¶ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen, to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good, that seek him, but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23. So we fasted, and besought our God for this, and he was intreated of us.

Ezra has procured Levites to go along with him, but what will that avail unless he have God with him? That is therefore his chief care; in all our ways we must acknowledge God, and in those particularly wherein we are endeavouring to serve the interest of his kingdom among men; Ezra doth so here. Observe,

1. The steadfast confidence he had in God, and in his gracious protection; he told the king, *ver. 22.* what principles he went upon, that those who seek God are safe under the shadow of his wings, even in their greatest dangers: but those who forsake him are continually exposed, even then when they are most secure. God's servants have his power engaged for them, his enemies have it engaged against them. This Ezra believed with his heart, and with his mouth made confession of it before the king, and therefore he was ashamed to ask of the king a convoy, lest therefore he should give occasion to the king and those about him to suspect either God's power to help, his people, or Ezra's confidence in that power. They that trust in God, and triumph in him, will be ashamed of seeking to the creature for protection, especially for using any sorry shifts for their own safety, because thereby they contradict themselves and their own confidence. Not but that those who depend upon God, must use proper means for their preservation, and they need not be ashamed to do it; but when the honour of God is concerned, one would rather expose ones self, than do any thing to the prejudice of that, which ought to be dearer to us than our lives.

2. The solemn application he made to God in that confidence, he proclaimed a fast, *ver. 21.* No doubt he had himself begged of God direction in this affair, from the first time he had it in his thoughts: but for public mercies, public prayers must be made; that all who are to share in the comfort of it, may join in request for it. Their fasting was, (1.) To express their humiliation; this he declares to be the intent and meaning of it, that we might afflict ourselves before our God for our sins, and so be qualified for the pardon of them; when we are entering upon any new condition of life, our care should be to bring none of the guilt of the sins of our former condition into it; when we are in any imminent peril, let us be sure to make our peace with God, and when we are safe, nothing can do us any real hurt. (2.) To excite their supplications; prayer was always joined with religious fasting; their errand to the throne of grace was to seek of God a right way, i. e. to commit themselves to the conduct of the divine providence, to put themselves under the divine protection, and to beg of God to guide and keep them in their journey, and bring them safely to their journey's end. They were strangers in the road, were to march through their enemies' countries, and had not a pillar of cloud and fire to lead them as their fathers had; but they believed the power and favour of God, and the ministration of his angels would be to them instead of that, and hoped by prayer to engage this for them. Note, All our concerns about ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty by prayer to commit to God, and leave the care of them with him, *Phil. iv. 6.*

3. The good success of their doing so, *ver. 23.* we besought our God by joint prayer, and he was intreated of us; they had some comfortable assurance in their own minds that their prayers were answered, and the event declared it, for never any that sought God in earnest fought in vain.

24. ¶ Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hathabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 25. And weighed unto them the silver and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of God, which the king and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered, 26. I even weighed unto their hands, six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents: 27. Also twenty basins of gold, of a thousand drams, and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. 28. And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD, the vessels are holy also, and the silver and the gold are a free-will-offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. 29. Watch ye, and keep them until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests, and the Levites and chief of the fathers of Israel at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. 30. So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

We have here an account of the particular care which Ezra took of the treasure he had with him that belonged to God's sanctuary. Observe, (1.) Having committed the keeping of it to God; he committed the keeping of it to proper men, whose business it must be to watch it: though without our God they wake in vain. Note, Our prayers must always be seconded with our endeavours; the care of Christ's gospel, his church and ordinances, must not be so left with him, but that it must always be committed to faithful men, 2 Tim. ii. 2. (2.) Having prayed to God to preserve all the substance they had with them, he shews himself especially solicitous for that part of it which belonged to the house of God, and was an offering to him. Do we expect God should by his providence keep that which belongs to us, let us by his grace keep that which belongs to him; let God's honour and interest be our care, and then we may expect that our lives and comforts will be his.

Observe, 1. The persons to whom he delivered the offerings of the house of God. Twelve chief priests, and as many Levites, he appointed to this trust, *ver. 24, 30.* who were bound by their office to take care of the things of God, and were in a particular manner to have the benefit of these sacred treasures. Ezra tells them why he put those things into their hands, *ver. 28.* ye are holy unto the Lord, the vessels are holy also, and who so fit to take care of holy things as holy persons? Those that have the dignity and honour of the priesthood, must take along with it the trust and duty of it. The prophet is foretelling the return of God's people and ministers out of Babylon, when he gives that solemn charge, *Ista. lii. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.*

2. The great exactness with which he lodged this trust in their hands, he weighed them the silver, the gold, and the vessels, *ver. 25.* because he expected to have it from them again by weight. In all trusts, but especially sacred ones, we ought to be punctual, and preserve a right understanding on both sides. In Zerubbabab's time the vessels were delivered by number, here by weight, that all might be forth coming, and it might easily appear if any were missing; to intimate, that such as are intrusted with holy things, as all the stewards of the mysteries of God are) are concerned to remember, both in receiving their trust, and in discharging it, that they must shortly give a very particular account of it, that they may be faithful to it, and to give up their account with joy.

3. The

3. The charge he gave them with these treasures, *ver. 29. watch ye and keep them*, that they be not lost or embezzled or mingled with the other carriages, keep them together, keep them by themselves, keep them safe, till you weigh them in the temple, before the great men there; hereby intimating how much it was their concern to be careful and faithful, and would be their honour to be found so. Thus when St. Paul charged Timothy with the gospel treasure, he bids him keep it *until the appearing of Jesus Christ*, and his appearing before him to give account of his trust, when his fidelity would be his crown.

31. ¶ Then we departed from the river of Ahava, on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33. Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold, and the vessels weighed in the house of our God, by the hand of Meremoth, the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites: 34. By number, and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. 35. Also the children of those that had been carried away which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt-offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks, for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he-goats for a sin offering; all *this was a burnt-offering unto the LORD*. 36. ¶ And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river, and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

We now attend Ezra to Jerusalem, a journey of about four months in all, but his multitude made his marches slow, and his stages short: Now here we are to d,

1. That his God was good, and he owns it; *the hand of our God was upon us*, to spirit us for our undertaking, and to him they owed it, (1.) That they were preserved in their journey, and not all cut off, for there were enemies, that *laid wait for them by the way* to do them a mischief, and, at least, like Amalek to *smite the hindmost of them*, but God protected them, *ver. 31*. Even the common perils of journies, are such as oblige us to sanctify our going out with prayer, and our returns in peace with praise and thanksgiving; much more ought God to be thus eyed in such a dangerous expedition as this was. (2.) That they were brought in safety to their journey's end, *ver. 32*. Let them that have steadfastly set their faces towards the new Jerusalem proceed and persevere to the end, *till they appear before God in Zion*, and they shall find *he that has begun the good work will perform it*.

2. That his treasures were faithful; when they were come to Jerusalem they were impatient to be discharged of their trust, and therefore applied themselves to the great men of the temple, who received it from them, and gave them an acquittance in full, *ver. 33, 34*. It is a great ease to one's mind to be discharged from a trust; and a great honour to one's name, to be able to make it appear that it hath been faithfully discharged.

3. That his companions were devout; as soon as they came to be near the altar, they thought themselves obliged to offer sacrifice, whatever they had done in Babylon, *ver. 35*. that will be dispensed with when we want opportunity, which when the door is opened again will be expected from us. It is observable, (1.) That among their sacrifices they had a sin-offering: for it is the atonement that sweetens and secures every mercy to us, which will not be truly comfortable, unless *iniquity be taken away* and our peace made with God. (2.) That the number of their offerings related to the number of the tribes, twelve bullocks, twelve he-goats, and rams ninety-six, eight times twelve. Hereby signifying the union of the two kingdoms, according to what was foretold, *Ezek. xxxvii. 22*. They did not any longer go two tribes one way, and ten another, but all the twelve met by their representatives at the same altar.

4. That even the enemies of the Jews became their friends, vailed to Ezra's commission, and instead of hindering the people of God furthered them, *ver. 36*. purely in complaisance to the king; when he appeared moderate, they all coveted to appear so too. *Then had the churches rest*.

C H A P. IX.

*The affairs of the church were in a very good posture, we may well suppose, now Ezra presided in them; look without, the government was kind to them, we have no complaints of persecution and oppression, their enemies had either their hearts turned, or at least their hands tied; their neighbours were civil, and we hear of no wars or rumours of wars; none to make them afraid; all was well as could be, considering that they were few and poor, and subjects to a foreign prince: look at home, and we hear nothing of Baal, or Ashtoreth, or Moloch, no images in groves, or golden calves, no nor so much as high-places, not only no idolatrous altars, but no separate ones, but the temple duly respected, and the temple service carefully kept up: and yet all was not well neither, the purest ages of the church have had some corruptions, and it will never be presented without spot or wrinkle, till it is a glorious church, a church triumphant, Eph. v. 27. We have here, (1.) A complaint brought to Ezra of the many marriages that had been made with strange wives, *ver. 1, 2*. (2.) The great troubles which he, and others influenced by his example, were in upon this information, *ver. 3, 4*. (3.) The solemn confession which he made of this sin to God with godly sorrow and shame, *ver. 5—15*.*

1. **N**OW when these things were done, the princes came to me saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites,

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the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. 2. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of *those* lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers have been chief in this trespass. 3. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. 4. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

Ezra, like Barnabas, when he came to Jerusalem and saw the grace of God to his brethren there, no doubt was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave to the Lord, Acts xi. 23. he saw nothing amiss; many corruptions lurk out of the view of the most vigilant rulers: but here is a damp upon his joys; information is brought him that many of the people, yea and some of the rulers, had married wives out of heathen families, and joined themselves in affinity with strangers.

Observe, 1. What the sin was that they were guilty of. It was *mingling themselves with the people of those lands*, *ver. 2*. associating with them both in trade and in conversation, making themselves familiar with them, and to complete the affinity, taking *their daughters in marriages* to their sons; we are willing to hope they did not worship their gods, their captivity had cured them of their idolatry; it is said indeed they *did according to their abominations*; but that (saith Bishop Patrick) here signifies only the imitation of the heathen in promiscuous marriages with any nation whatsoever; which by degrees would lead them to idolatry again. Herein, (1.) They disobeyed the express command of God, which forbade all intimacy with the heathen, and particularly in matrimonial contracts, *Deut. vii. 3*. (2.) They profaned the crown of their peculiarity, and set themselves upon a level with those, above whom God had by singular marks of his favour, of late as well as formerly, dignified them. (3.) They distrusted the power of God to protect and advance them, and were led by carnal policy, hoping to strengthen themselves, and make an interest among their neighbours by these alliances. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of all the sorry shifts we make to help ourselves. (4.) They exposed themselves, and much more their children, to the peril of idolatry, the very sin, and introduced by this very way, that had once been the ruin of their church and nation.

2. Who were the persons that were guilty of this sin; not only some of the unthinking people of Israel that knew no better, but *many of the priests and Levites*, whose office it was to teach the law, and this law among the rest, and in whom, by reason of their elevation above common Israelites, it was a greater crime. It was a diminution to the sons of that tribe to match into any other tribe, and they seldom did, except into the royal tribe, but for them to match with heathens, with Canaanites, and Hittites, and I know not who, was such a disparagement as if they had had any sense, though not of duty, yet of honour, one would think they should never have been guilty of: yet this was not the worst neither; *The hand of the princes and rulers*, who by their power should have prevented or reformed this high misdemeanor, *was chief in this trespass*. If princes be in a trespass, they will be charged as chief in it, because of the influence their example will have upon others; *many will follow their pernicious ways*. But miserable is the case of that people whose leaders debauch them and cause them to err.

3. The information that was given of this to Ezra; it was given by the persons that were most proper to complain, the princes, those of them that had kept their integrity, and with it their dignity; they could not have accused others, if they themselves had not been free from blame. It was given to the person that had power to mend the matter, that as a *ready scribe in the law of God* could argue with them, and as king's commissioner could awe them. It is likely, these princes had often endeavoured to redress this grievance, and could not, but now they apply themselves to Ezra, hoping his wisdom, authority, and interest, would prevail to do it. Those that cannot of themselves reform public abuses, may yet do good service by giving information to those that can.

4. The impression this made upon Ezra, *ver. 3*. *He rent his cloaths, plucked off his hair, and sat down astonished*. Thus he expressed the deep sense he had, (1.) Of the dishonour he chy due to God. It grieved him to the heart, to think that a people called by his name, should so grossly violate his law, should be so little benefited by his correction, and make such ill returns for his favours. (2.) Of the mischief the people had hereby done to themselves, and the danger they were in of the wrath of God breaking out against them. Note, 1. Others' sins should be our sorrow, and the injury done by them to God's honour, and the souls of men, is what we should lay to heart. (2.) Sorrow for sin must be great sorrow, such Ezra's was, as for an only son or a first-born. The scandalous sins of professors are what we have reason to be astonished at. We may stand amazed to see men contradict, disparage, prejudice, ruin themselves. Strange, that men should act so inconsiderately, and so inconsistently with themselves, *upright men are astonished at it*.

5. The influence which Ezra's grief for this had upon others: we may suppose he went up to the house of the Lord, there to humble himself, because he had an eye to God in his grief, and that was the proper place of deprecating his displeasure; public notice was taken of it, and all the devout serious people that were at hand, assembled themselves to him, it should seem of their own accord, for nothing is said of their being sent to, *ver. 4*. Note, 1. It is the character of good people, that they *tremble at God's word*, they stand in awe of the authority of its precepts, and the severity and justice of its threatenings, and to them that do so *will God look*, Isa. lxvi. 2. 2. They that tremble at the word of God, cannot but tremble at the *sins of men*, by which the law of God is broken, and his wrath and curse incurred. 3. The pious zeal of one against sin, may perhaps provoke very many to the like, as the apostle speaks in another place, *2 Cor. ix. 2*. Many will follow that have not consideration, conduct, and courage enough to lead in a good work. 4. All good people ought to own those that appear and act in the cause of God against vice and profaneness, to stand by them, and do what they can to strengthen their hands.

5. ¶ And in the evening sacrifice; I arose up from my heaviness, and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God. 6. And said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head,

and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. 7. Since the days of our fathers *have we been* in a great trespass unto this day, and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to spoil, and to confusion of face, as *it is* this day. 8. And now for a little space, grace hath been *showed* from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. 9. For we *were* bondmen, yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. 10. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, 11. Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land, with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another, with their uncleanness. 12. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace, or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. 13. And after all that is come upon us, for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this: 14. Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hast consumed us, so that *there should be* no remnant nor escaping? 15. O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous, for we remain yet escaped, as *it is* this day: behold we *are* before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee, because of this.

What the meditations of Ezra's heart were, while for some hours he sat down astonished, we may guess by the words of his mouth, when at length he *spoke with his tongue*; and a most pathetic address he here makes to heaven upon this occasion. Observe,

1. The time when he made this address; *at the evening sacrifice*, ver. 5. Then (it is likely) devout people used to come into the courts of the temple, to grace the solemnity of the sacrifice, and to offer up their own prayers to God in concurrence with it. In their hearing, Ezra chose to make this confession, that they might be made duly sensible of the sins of their people, which hitherto they had either not taken notice of, or had made light of. Prayer may preach. The sacrifice, and especially the evening sacrifice, was a type of the great propitiation, that blessed Lamb of God, who, in the evening of the world, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself, to which we may suppose Ezra had an eye of faith in this penitential address to God; he makes confession with his hand, as it were, upon the head of that great sacrifice, through which *we receive the atonement*. Certainly Ezra was no stranger to the message which the angel Gabriel had some years ago delivered to Daniel, at the time of the evening sacrifice, and as it were in explication of it, concerning Messiah the prince, Dan. ix. 24. and perhaps had regard to that in choosing this time.

2. His preparation for this address. (1.) He *rose up from his hearings*, and so far shook off the burden of his grief, as was necessary to the lifting up of his heart to God. He recovered himself from his astonishment, got the tumult of his troubled spirits somewhat stilled, and his spirit composed for communion with God. (2.) He *fell upon his knees*, put himself into the posture of a penitent humbling himself, and a petitioner suing for mercy, and in both representing the people for whom he was now an intercessor. (3.) He *spread out his hands*, as one affected with what he was going to say, offering it up unto God, waiting and reaching out, as it were, with an earnest expectation, to receive a gracious answer. And in this he had an eye to God, as the Lord and his God, a God of power, but a God of grace.

3. The address itself. It is not properly to be called a prayer, for there is not a word of petition in it, but if we give prayer its full latitude, it is the offering up of pious and devout affections to God, and very devout, very pious, are the affections which Ezra here expresseth. His address is a penitent confession of sin, not his own, from a conscience burdened with its own guilt, and apprehensive of his own danger, but the sin of his people, from a gracious concern for the honour of God, and the welfare of Israel. Here is a lively picture of ingenuous repentance. Observe in this address,

1. The confession he makes of the sin, and the aggravation of it which he insists upon, to affect his own heart, and theirs that joined with him with holy sorrow and shame and fear, in the consideration of it, that they might be deeply humbled for it. And it is observable, though he himself were wholly clear from this guilt, yet he puts himself into the number of the sinners, because he was a member of the same community, *our sins, and our trespasss*. Perhaps he now remembered it against himself, as his fault that he had staid so long after his brethren in Babylon, and had not separated himself so soon as he might have done from the people of those lands. When we are lamenting the wickedness of the wicked, it may be if we duly reflect upon ourselves, and give our own hearts leave to deal faithfully with us, we may find something of the same nature, though in a lower degree, that we also have been guilty of. However he speaks that which was or should have been the general complaint.

(1.) He owns their sins to have been very great, *our iniquities are increased over our heads*, ver. 6. we are ready to perish in them as in deep waters: so general was the prevalence of them, so violent the power of them, and so threatening were they of the most pernicious consequences. Iniquity is grown up to that height among us that it reaches to the heavens, so very impudent that it dares heaven, so very provoking, that, like the sin of Sodom, it cries to heaven for vengeance. But let this be the comfort of

true penitents, that though their sins reach to the heavens, God's mercy is in the heavens, Psalm xxxvi. 5. *Where sin abounds, grace will much more abound.*

(2.) Their sin had been long persisted in, *ver. 7. since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass*. The example of those that were gone before them, he thought so far from excusing their fault, that it aggravated it; we should take warning not to stumble at the same stone. The corruption is so much the worse, that it has taken deep root, and begins to plead prescription, but by this means we have reason to fear the measure of the iniquity near full.

(3.) The great and sore judgments which God had brought upon them for their sins, did very much aggravate them. *For our iniquities we have been delivered to the sword and to captivity*, ver. 7. and yet not reformed, yet not reclaimed; brayed in the mortar, and yet the *folly not gone*, Prov. xxvi. 22. corrected but not reclaimed.

(4.) The late mercies God had bestowed upon them did likewise very much aggravate their sins. This he insists largely upon, *ver. 8, 9.* Observe;

(1.) The time of mercy, *now for a little space*, i. e. It is but a little while since we had our liberty, and it is not likely to continue long. This greatly aggravated their sin; that they were so lately in the furnace, and that they knew not how soon they might return to it again, what, and yet be secure!

(2.) The fountain of mercy, *grace has been showed us from the Lord*. The kings of Persia were the instruments of their enlargement, but he ascribes it to God, and to his grace, his free grace without any merit of theirs. (3.) The streams of mercy. They were *not forsaken in their bondage*, but even in Babylon had the tokens of God's presence, that they were a remnant of Israelites left, a few out of many, and those narrowly escaped out of the hands of their enemies; by the favour of the kings of Persia: but especially that they had *a nail in his holy place*, i. e. (as it is explained, *ver. 9.*) that they had set up the *house of God*. They had their religion settled, and the service of the temple in a constant method. We are to reckon it a great comfort and advantage, to have stated opportunities of worshipping God. *Blessed are they that dwell in God's house*, like Anna that departed not from the temple; *this is my rest for ever*, saith the gracious soul. (4.) The effects of all this. It enlightened their eyes, and it revived their hearts, i. e. was very comfortable to them, and the more sensibly so, because it was in their bondage, it was life from the dead to them; though but a little reviving, it was a great favour considering that they deserved none, and the day of small things was an earnest of greater. Now (saith Ezra) how ungrateful are we to offend a God that has been so kind to us; how disingenuous to mingle ourselves in sin with those nations from whom we have been in wonderful mercy delivered; how unwise to expose ourselves to God's displeasure when we are tried with the returns of his favour, and are upon our good behaviour for the continuance of it.

(5.) It was a great aggravation of the sin that it was against an express command. *We have forsaken thy commandments*, ver. 10. It seems to have been an ancient law of the house of Jacob, not to match with the families of the uncircumcised, Gen. xxxiv. 14. But besides that, God had strictly forbidden it. He recites the command, *ver. 11, 12.* for then sin appears sin, appears exceeding sinful, when we compare it with the law which is broken by it; nothing could be more express, *give not your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons*. The reason given is, because if they mingled with those nations, they would pollute themselves; it is an unclean land, and you are a holy people; but if they kept themselves distinct from them, it would be their honour and safety, and the perpetuating of their prosperity. Now to violate a command so express, backed with such reasons, and a fundamental law of their constitution, was very provoking to the God of heaven.

(6.) That in the judgments, by which they had already smarted for their sins, God had *punished them less than their iniquities deserved*, so that he looked upon them to be still in debt upon the old account, what? and yet shall we run upon a new score? Has God dealt so gently with us in correcting us, and shall we thus abuse his favour, and turn his grace into wantonness? God in his grace and mercy had said concerning Sion's captivity, *she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins*, Isa. xl. 2. but Ezra, in a penitential sense of the great malignity that was in their sin, though the punishment was very great, owns it *less than they deserved*.

2. The devout affections that were working in him, in making this confession. Speaking of sin,

(1.) He speaks as one much ashamed. With this he begins, *ver. 6. O my God, I am ashamed, and blush, O my God*, (so the words are placed) *to lift up my face unto thee*. Note, 1. Sin is a shameful thing; as soon as ever our first parents had eaten forbidden fruit, they were ashamed of themselves. 2. Holy shame is as necessary an ingredient in true and ingenuous repentance as holy sorrow. 3. Others sins should be our shame, and we should blush for those that do not blush for themselves; we may well be ashamed that we are any thing akin to those who are so ungrateful to God, and unwise for themselves. This is *clearing ourselves*, 2 Cor. vii. 11. 4. Penitent sinners never see so much reason to blush and be ashamed, as when they come to *lift up their faces before God*. A natural sense of our own honour which we have injured, will make us ashamed when we have done an ill thing to look men in the face, but a gracious concern for God's honour will make us much more ashamed to look him in the face. The publican when he went to the temple to pray, hung down his head more than ever, as one ashamed, Luke xviii. 13. 5. An eye to God as our God, will be of great use to us in the exercise of repentance. Ezra begins, *O my God*, and again in the same breath, *my God*. The consideration of our covenant relation to God as ours, will help to humble us and break our hearts for sin, that we should violate both his precepts to us, and our promises to him: it will also encourage us to hope for pardon upon repentance. He is my God for all this, and every transgression in the covenant doth not throw us out of covenant.

(2.) He speaks as one much amazed, *ver. 10. What shall we say after this?* For my part I know not what to say: if God do not help us, we are undone. The discoveries of guilt are amazing, the more we think of sin, the worse it looks; the difficulty of the case is amazing, how shall we recover ourselves? which way shall we make our peace with God? (1.) The true penitents are at a loss what to say: shall we say we have *not sinned*, or that *God will not require it*? If we do, *we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*. Shall we say, have patience with us, and we will pay thee all, with *thousands of rams, or our first born for our transgression*? God will not thus be mocked, he knows we are insolvent. Shall we say, *there is no hope, and let come on us what will*? That is but to make it all worse. (2.) True penitents will consider what to say, and should. 24. Ezra, big of God to teach them; what shall we say? say I have sinned; I have done foolishly; God be merciful to me a sinner, and the like. See *Isa. xiv. 2.*

(3.) He speaks as one much afraid, *ver. 13. I. After all the judgments that are come upon us, to reclaim us from sin, and all the deliverances that have been wrought for us, to engage us to God and duty; if we should again break God's commandments, by joining in affinity with the children of disobedience, and learning their ways, what else could we expect*

poet, but that God should be *angry with us till he had consumed us*, and there should not be so much as a remnant left, nor any to escape the destruction. There is not a sorer or sadder preface of ruin to any people, than revolving to sin, to the same sins again, after great judgments, and great deliverances. They that will be wrought upon neither by the one nor by the other, are fit to be rejected, as reprobate silver, for the *founder melteth in vain*.

(4.) He speaks as one much assured of the righteousness of God, and resolved to acquiesce in that, and to leave the matter with him, whose judgment is according to truth, ver. 15. *Thou art righteous, wife, and just, and good, that wilt neither do us wrong, nor be hard upon us, and therefore behold we are before thee*, we lie at thy feet waiting our doom, *we cannot stand before thee*, intreating upon any righteously of our own, having no plea to support us or bring us off, and therefore we *fall down before thee, in our trespass*, and cast ourselves on thy mercy, *do unto us whatever seemeth good unto thee*, Judges x. 15. We have nothing to say, nothing to do, but to make supplication to our Judge, Job ix. 15. Thus doth this good man lay his grief before God, and then leave it with him.

C H A P. X.

In this chapter we have that grievance redressed, which was complained of and lamented in the foregoing chapter. Observe, (1.) How the people's hearts were prepared for the redress of it, by their deep humiliation for the sin, ver. 1. (2.) How it was proposed to Ezra by Shechaniah, ver. 2—4. (3.) How the proposal was put in execution. (1.) The great men were sworn to stand to it, ver. 5. (2.) Ezra appeared first in it, ver. 6. (3.) A general assembly was called, ver. 7—9. (4.) They all in compliance with Ezra's exhortation agreed to the reformation, ver. 10—14. (5.) Commissioners were appointed to sit, do die in diem, to enquire who had married strange wives, and to oblige them to put them away, which is done accordingly, ver. 15—17. and a list of the names of those that were found guilty given in, ver. 18—19.

1. **N**OW when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel, a very great congregation of men, and women, and children: for the people wept very sore. 2. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives, of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. 3. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God, to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the law. 4. Arise: for this matter belongeth unto thee; we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. 5. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel to swear that they should do according to this word: and they swore.

We are told,

1. What good impressions were made upon the people by Ezra's humiliation and confession of sin. No sooner was it noised in the city, that their new governor whom they had joy in, was himself in grief, and to so great a degree for them and their sin, but presently there *assembled to him a very great congregation*, to see what the matter was, and to mingle their tears with his, ver. 1. Our weeping for other people's sins may perhaps set them a weeping for them themselves, who otherwise would have continued senseless and remorseless. See what a happy influence the good examples of great ones may have upon their inferiors. When Ezra, a scribe, a scholar, a man in authority under the king, so passionately lamented the public corruptions, they concluded they were indeed very grievous, else he would not thus have grieved for them, and this drew tears from every eye: *men, women, and children, wept very sore*, when he wept thus.

2. What a good motion Shechaniah made upon this occasion. The place was Bochim, a place of weepers; but, for aught appears, there was a profound silence among them, as among Job's friends, who *spoke not a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great*, till Shechaniah (one of Ezra's companions from Babylon, chap. viii. 3—5.) stood up and made a speech addressed to Ezra, in which,

1. He owns the national guilt, sums up all Ezra's confession in one word, and sets to his seal, that it was true, *we have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives*, ver. 2. The matter is too plain to be denied, and too bad to be excused. It doth not appear that Shechaniah was himself culpable in this matter, if he had had the beam in his own eye, he could not have seen so clearly to pluck it out of his brother's eye; but his father was guilty, and divers of his father's house, as appears, ver. 26. and therefore he reckons himself among the trespassers; nor doth he seek to excuse or palliate the sin, though some of his own relations were guilty of it; but, in the name of God, *said to his father, I have not known him*, as, Levi, Deut. xxxiii. 9. Perhaps the strange wife that his father had married, had been an unjust unkind step-mother to him, and had made mischief in the family, and he supposed others had done the like, which made him the more forward to appear against this corruption, and if so, it was not the only time that private resentments have been over-ruled by the providence of God to serve the public good.

2. He encourageth himself, and others, to hope, that though the matter was bad, it might be amended, yet *now there is hope in Israel* (where else should we hope but in Israel! they that are strangers to that commonwealth, are said to have *no hope*, Eph. ii. 12.) even concerning this thing. The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed, a stop put to the spreading of the contagion, and so the judgments which the sin deserves may be prevented, and all will be well. *Now there is hope*; now the disease is discovered, it is half cured. Now the alarm is taken, the people begin to be sensible of the mischief, and to lament it, a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out upon them, and they are all thus humbling themselves before God for it, *now there is hope*, that God will forgive and have mercy. The valley of Achor, i. e. of trouble, is the door of hope, Hos. ii. 15. for the sin that really troubles us shall not ruin us.

There is hope now Israel has such a prudent, pious, zealous governor as Ezra, to manage this affair. Note, 1. In melancholy times we must see and observe what makes for us, as well as what makes against us. 2. There may be good hopes through grace, even when their is the sense of great guilt before God. 3. Where sin is seen and lamented, and good steps taken towards a reformation, even sinners ought to be encouraged. 4. Even great sins must thankfully receive seasonable counsel and comfort from those that are wiser than themselves, as Ezra from Shechaniah.

3. Headily, that a speedy and effectual course should be taken for the divorcing of the first wives. The case is plain, what has been done amiss, must be undone again as far as possible; nothing less than that is true repentance. Let us put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, ver. 3. Ezra, though he knew this was the only way of redressing the grievance, yet perhaps did not think it feasible, and despaired of ever bringing the people to it, which put him into that confusion that we left him in, in the foregoing chapter; but Shechaniah, who converted more with the people than he did, assured him the thing was practicable, if they went wisely to work. As to us now, it is certain sin must be put away, a bill of divorce must be given in, with a resolution never to have any thing more to do with it, else no pardon, no peace; though it be dear as the wife of thy bosom, nay, as a right eye, or a right hand; what has been unjustly got, cannot be justly kept, but must be restored; but as to the case of being *unequally yoked with unbelievers*, Shechaniah's counsel, which he was then to clear in, will not hold now; such marriages it is certain are sinful, and ought not to be made, but they are not null, *quod fieri non debuit factum valet*, our rule under the gospel is, 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13. *If thy brother has a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away*.

4. He puts them into a good method for the effecting of this reformation, and shews them not only that it must be done, but how. (1.) Let Ezra, and all those that were present in this assembly, agree in a resolution that this must be done; pass a vote immediately to this purpose, it will now pass *without contradiction*, that it may be said to be done *according to the counsel of my lord*, the president of the assembly, with the unanimous concurrence of those that tremble at the commandment of our God, which is the description of those that were gathered to him, chap. ix. 1. Declare it to be the sense of all the sober serious people among us, which cannot but have a great sway among Israelites. (2.) Let the command of God in this matter, which Ezra had recited in his prayer, be laid before the people, and let them see that it is *done according to the law*; we have that to warrant us, nay, that binds us to what we do; it is not an addition of our own to the divine law, but the necessary execution of it. (3.) While we are in a good mind, let us bind ourselves by a solemn vow and covenant, that we will do it, but, when the present impressions are worn off, the thing be left undone. Let us covenant not only that, if we have strange wives ourselves, we will put them away, but that if we have not, we will do what we can in our places to oblige them to put away theirs. (4.) Let Ezra himself preside in this matter, who is authorized by the king's commission, to enquire whether the law of God was duly observed in Judah and Jerusalem, chap. vii. 14. and let us all resolve to stand by him in it, ver. 4. *Arise, be of good courage*. Weaving in this case is good, but reforming is better. See what God said to Joshua in a like case, Josh. vii. 10, 11.

5. What good resolution they came to upon this good motion, ver. 5. They not only agreed that it should be done, but bound themselves with an oath that they would do according to his word. *Fait bind, fait find*.

6. ¶ Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. 7. and they made proclamation throughout Judea and Jerusalem, unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem: 8. And that whosoever would not come within three days according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away. 9. ¶ Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin, gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days: it was the ninth month, and the twentieth day of the month, and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. 10. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives to encrease the trespass of Israel. 11. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. 12. Then all the congregation answered, and said with a loud voice, As thou hast, so must we do. 13. But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. 14. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities, come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

We have here an account of the proceedings upon the resolutions lately taken up concerning the strange wives; no time was lost; they struck when the iron was hot, and soon set the wheels of reformation a-going.

1. Ezra went to the council chamber, where it is probable the priests used to meet up on public business. And till he came thither, (so Bishop Patrick thinks it should be read) till he saw something done, and more likely to be done for the redress of this grievance, he did *neither eat nor drink*, but continued mourning. Sorrow for sin should be abiding sorrow; be sure let it continue till the sin be put away.

2. He sent orders to all the children of the captivity to attend him at Jerusalem.

Jerusalem within *three days*, ver. 7, 8. and being authorised by the king to enforce his orders, with penalties annexed, *chap. vii. 26*: he threatened, that whosoever refused to obey these summons should forfeit his estate, and be out-lawed. He that would not attend on this religious account, his doom should be, that his substance should, in his stead, be ever after appropriated to the service of their religion, and he himself, for his contempt, should for ever after be excluded from the honours and privileges of their religion; that he should be excommunicated.

3. Within the time limited the generality of the people met at Jerusalem, and made their appearance *in the street of the house of God*, ver. 9. They that had no zeal for the work they were called to, nay, perhaps had a dislike to it, being themselves delinquents, yet paid such deference to Ezra's authority, and were so awed by the penalty that they durst not stay away.

4. God gave them a token of his displeasure, in the great rain that happened at that time, *ver. 9* and again *ver. 13*, which perhaps kept some away, however it was grievous to them that met in the open street, when they wept, the heavens wept too, signifying that though God was angry with them for their sin, yet he was well pleased with their repentance, and (as it is said, *Judges x. 16*.) *his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel*; and it was also an indication of the good fruits of their repentance, for the rain makes the earth fruitful.

5. Ezra gave them the charge at this great office, told them upon what account he called them together now, because he found, that since their return out of captivity they had *increased the trespasses of Israel by marrying strange wives*, added to their former sins this new transgression, which would certainly be a means of introducing idolatry again, the very sin they had smarted for, and which he hoped they had been cured of in their captivity. And he called them together, that they might *confess their sin to God*, and having done that, might declare themselves ready and willing to do his pleasure, as it should be made them, which all those will do that truly repent of what they had done to incur his displeasure, and particularly that they might separate themselves from all idolaters, especially idolatrous wives, *ver. 10, 11*. On these heads, we may suppose, he enlarged, and probably made such another confession of the sin now, as he had made, *chap. ix.* which he enquired them to say Amen to.

6. The people submitted themselves not only to Ezra's jurisdiction in general, but to his inquisition and determination in this matter. *As thou hast said, so must we do*, ver. 12. We have sinned in mingling ourselves with the heathen, and have thereby endangered not only our being corrupted by them, for we are frail, but our being lost among them, for we are few, and therefore we are convinced there is an absolute necessity of our separating from them again; then there is hope of people, when they are convinced not only that it is good to part with their sins, but that it is indispensably necessary, we must do it, or we are undone.

7. It was agreed, that this affair should be carried on not in a popular assembly, nor that they should think to go through with it all on a sudden, but that a court of delegates should be appointed to receive complaints, and to hear and determine upon them. It could not be done at this time, for it was not put into a method, nor could the people stand out because of the rain; the delinquents were many, and it would require time to discover and examine them. Nice cases would arise, which could not be adjudged without debate and deliberation, *ver. 13*. And therefore let the crowd be dismissed, and the rulers stand to receive informations; let them proceed city by city, and let the offenders be convicted before them in the presence of the judges and elders of their own city, and let them be intrusted to see the orders executed; thus *take time, and we shall have done the sooner*; whereas if we do it in a hurry we shall do it by the halves, *ver. 14*. And in this method a thorough reformation he made, the *force of God's will* will be turned from us, which we are sensible is ready to break forth against us for this transgression.

Ezra was willing that his zeal should be guided by the people's prudence, and put the matter into this method: and is not ashamed to own that the advice came from them, no more than he was to comply with it.

15. ¶ Only Jonathan the son of Asahel, and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah, were employed about this matter: and Meshullam, and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. 16. And the children of the captivity did so: and Ezra the priest, with certain chiefs of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives, by the first day of the first month. 18. ¶ And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: *namely*, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren: Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19. And they gave their hands, that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass. 20. And of the sons of Immer; Hanani and Zebadiah. 21. And of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uzziab. 22. And of the sons of Pathur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ithmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasah. 23. Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita), Pethah-

iah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24. Of the fingers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. 25. Moreover, of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah. and Benaiah. 26. And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. 27. And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. 28. Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. 29. And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adai, and Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth. 30. And of the sons of Pahath-moab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. 31. And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon. 32. Benjamin, Malloch, and Shemariah. 33. Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathar, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. 34. Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel. 35. Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh. 36. Yaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib. 37. Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaafau. 38. And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei. 39. And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adai, 40. Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai. 41. Azazel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah. 42. Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. 43. Of the sons of Nebo, Jeiel, Mattathiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah. 44. All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

The method of proceeding in this matter being concluded on, and the congregations dismissed, that each in their respective places might gain and give intelligence, to facilitate the matter; we are told,

1. Who were the persons that undertook to manage the matter, and bring the causes regularly before the commissioners, Jonathan and Jahaziah, two active men, neither of the priests or of the people doth not appear, probably they were the men that made that proposal, *ver. 13, 14*, being the fittest to see it pursued; and two honest Levites joined with them, and helped them, *ver. 15*. Dr. Lightfoot gives a contrary sense of this; *Only, (or nevertheless) Jonathan and Jahaziah stood against this matter*, (which reading the original will very well bear) and these two Levites helped them, in opposing it, either the thing itself or this method of proceeding. It was strange, if a work of this kind was carried on, and met with no opposition.

2. Who were the commissioners that sat upon this matter; Ezra was president, and with him *certain chiefs of the fathers* who were qualified with wisdom and zeal above others for this service, *ver. 16*. It was happy for them they had such a man as Ezra to lead them, they could not have done it well without his conduct, yet he would not do it without their concurrence.

3. How long they were about it. They began *the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter*, ver. 16. which was but ten days after this method was proposed, *ver. 9*. and they finished in three months, *ver. 17*. They sat close and minded their business, else they could not have dispatched so many causes as they had before them in so little time; for we may suppose, all that were impeached were fairly asked what cause they could shew why they should not be parted? and (if we may judge by other cases) provided the wife were profelyted to the Jewish religion, the was not to be put away; the trial of which would require great care.

4. Who the persons were that were found guilty of this crime, their names are here recorded to their perpetual reproach; many of the priests, nay, of the family of Joshua, the high-priest, were found guilty, *ver. 18*. though the law had particularly provided for the preserving of their honour in their marriages, that being holy themselves, they should not marry such as were profane, *Lev. xxi. 7*. They that should have taught others the law, broke it themselves, and by their example emboldened others to do likewise. But having lost their innocency in this matter, they did well to play an after-game, and lead in repentance, and give an example of that too; for (1.) They promised *under their hand* to put away their strange wives, and some think swore it with their *hands lifted up*. (2.) They took the appointed way of obtaining pardon, bringing the ram which was appointed by the law *for a trespass offering*, *Lev. vi. 6*. so owning their guilt, and the desert of it, and humbly suing for forgiveness.

About one hundred and thirteen in all are here named who had married strange wives, and some of them it is said, *ver. 44*. had children by them, which implies that not many of them had; God not crowning those marriages with the blessings of increase, whether the children were turned off with the mothers, as Shechaniah proposed, doth not appear, it should seem not; but however, it is likely that the wives that were put away, were well provided for according to their rank. One would think this grievance was now thoroughly redressed, yet we meet with it again, *Neh. xiii. 22*. and *Mal. ii. 11*. for such corruptions are easily and insensibly brought in, but not without great difficulty purged out again. The best reformers can but do their endeavour, but when the Redeemer himself shall come to Zion, he shall effectually turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

AN EXPOSITION, WITH PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS, Of the BOOK of NEHEMIAH.

This book continues the history of the *children of the captivity*; the poor Jews that were lately returned out of Babylon to their own land. At this time not only the Persian monarchy flourished in great pomp and power, but Greece and Rome began to be very great, and make a figure; of the affairs of those high and mighty states, we have authentic accounts extant; but the sacred and inspired history takes cognizance only of the state of the Jews, and makes no mention of other nations, but as the Israel of God had dealings with them, for the Lord's portion is his people, they are his peculiar treasure, and in comparison with them, the rest of the world is but as lumber; and in my eye, Ezra the Scribe, and Nehemiah the Tirshatha, though neither of them ever wore a crown, commanded an army, or conquered any country, or were famed for philosophy or oratory, yet both of them being pious praying men, and very serviceable in their day to the church of God and the interests of religion, were really greater men and more honourable, not only than any of the Roman consular dictators, but than Xenophon or Demosthenes, or Plato himself, who lived at the same time, the bright ornaments of Greece. Nehemiah's agency for the advancing of the settlement of Israel, we have a full account of in this book of his own commentaries or memoirs, wherein he records not only the works of his hands, but the workings of his heart in the management of public affairs, inserting in the story many devout reflections and ejaculations, which discover in his mind a very deep tincture of serious piety, and are peculiar to his writing. Twelve years he was governor of Judea, under Artaxerxes king of Persia, from his twentieth year, *chap. i. 1.* to his thirty-second year, *chap. xiii. 6.* whom Dr. Lightfoot supposeth to be the same Artaxerxes from whom Ezra had his commission. This book relates. (1.) Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem, and the commission he had obtained from the king to go thither, *chap. i. ii.* (2.) His building of the wall of Jerusalem, notwithstanding the opposition he met with, *chap. iii. iv.* (3.) His redressing the grievances of the people. *chap. v.* (4.) His finishing the wall, *chap. vi.* (5.) The account he took of the people, *chap. vii.* (6.) The religious solemnities of reading the law, fasting and praying, and renewing their covenants, which he called the people to, *chap. viii. ix. x.* (7.) The care he took for the replenishing of the holy city, and the settling of the holy tribe, *chap. xi. xii.* (8.) His zeal in reforming divers abuses, *chap. xiii.* Some call this the second book of Ezra, not because he was the penman of it, but because it is a continuation of the history of the foregoing book, to which it is connected, *ver. 1.* This was the last historical book that was written, as Malachi the last prophetic book of the Old Testament.

C H A P. I.

Here we first meet with Nehemiah at the Persian court, where we find him, (1.) Inquisitive concerning the state of the Jews and Jerusalem, ver. 1, 2. (2.) Informed of their deplorable state, ver. 3. (3.) Fasting and praying thereupon, ver. 4. with a particular account of his prayer, ver. 5—11. Such is the rise of this great man, by piety, not by policy.

1. **T**HE words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace. 2. That Hanani one of my brethren came, he and certain men of Judah: and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province, are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. 4. ¶ And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.

What tribe Nehemiah was of, doth no where appear, but if it be true which we are told by the author of the Maccabees, *book II, chap. i. 18.* that he offered sacrifice, we must conclude him to be a priest. We are here told, that he was in Shushan, the palace or royal city of the king of Persia, where the court was ordinarily kept, *ver. 1.* and *ver. 11.* that he was the king's cup-bearer. Kings and great men probably looked upon it as a piece of state to be attended by those of other nations. By this place at court, (1.) He would be the better qualified for the service of his country, in that post for which God had designed him; as Moses was the fitter to govern, for being bred up in Pharaoh's court, and David in Saul's. (2.) He would have the fairer opportunity of serving his country by his interest in the king and those about him. Observe, He is not forward to tell us what great preferment he had at court; it is not till the end of the chapter that he tells us he was the king's cup-bearer, (a place of great trust, as well as of honour and profit) when he could not avoid the mentioning of it because of the following story; but at first he only saith, *I was in Shushan the palace*; whence we may learn to be humble and modest, and sparing to speak of our own advancements. But in the providences of God concerning him, we may observe to our comfort, (1.) That when God has work to do, he will never want instruments to do it with. (2.) That those whom God designs to employ in his service, he will find out proper ways both to fit them for it, and to call them to it. (3.) That God has his remnants in all places; there was Obadiah in the house of Ahab, saints in Caesar's household, and a devout Nehemiah in Shushan the palace. (4.) That God can make the courts of princes sometimes nurseries and sometimes sanctuaries, to the friends and patrons of the church's cause.

Now here we have,

1. Nehemiah's tender and compassionate inquiry concerning the state of the Jews in their own land, *ver. 2.* It happened that a friend and relation of his came to the court with some other company, by whom he had an opportunity of informing himself fully how it went with the children of the

captivity, and what posture Jerusalem, the beloved city, was in. Nehemiah lived at ease, in honour, and fulfils himself, but cannot forget that he is an Israelite, nor shake off the thoughts of his brethren in distress, but he doth in spirit (like Moses, *Acts vii. 23.*) *visit them, and look upon their burthens.* As distance of place did not alienate his affections from them, though they were out of sight, yet not out of mind, so neither did, (1.) The dignity to which he was advanced. Though he was a great man, and probably rising higher, yet he did not think it below him to take cognizance of his brethren that were low and despised, nor was he ashamed to own his relation to them and concern for them. (2.) The diversity of their sentiments from his, and the difference of their practice accordingly. Though he did not go to settle at Jerusalem himself, (as we think he ought to have done, now liberty was proclaimed) but conformed to the court and staid there, yet he did not therefore judge or despise them that were returned, or upbraid them as impolitic, but kindly concerned himself for them, and was ready to do them all the good offices he could; and that he might know which way to do them a kindness, *he asked concerning them.* Note, It is lawful and good to inquire, what news? We should inquire especially concerning the state of the church and religion, and how it fares with the people of God; and the design of our inquiry must be, not that, like the Athenians, we may have something to talk of, but that we may know how to direct our prayers and praises.

2. The melancholy account which is here given him of the present state of the Jews and Jerusalem, *ver. 3.* Hanani, the person he enquired of, has this character given of him, *chap. ii. 2.* that he *feared God above many*, and therefore would not only speak truly, but when he spoke of the desolations of Jerusalem speak tenderly: and, it is probable, his errand to court at this time was to solicit for some favour, some relief or other that they stood in need of. Now the account he gives is, (1.) That the holy seed was miserably trampled on and abused; in great affliction and reproach; insulted upon all occasions by their neighbours, and *filled with the scornings of them that were at ease.* (2.) That the holy city was exposed and in ruins. The wall of Jerusalem was still broken down, and the gates as the Chaldeans left them, in ruins. This made the condition of the inhabitants both very despicable, under the abiding marks of poverty and slavery, and very dangerous, for their enemies might when they pleased make an easy prey of them. The temple was built, the government settled, and a work of reformation brought to some head, but here was one good work yet undone; this was still wanting: Every Jerusalem, on this side the heavenly one, will have some defect or other in it, for the making up of which it will require the help and service of its friends.

3. The great affliction this gave to Nehemiah, and the deep concern it put him into, *ver. 4.* (1.) *He wept and mourned.* It was not only just when he heard the news, that he fell into a passion of weeping, but his sorrow continued certain days. Note, The desolations and distresses of the church ought to be the matter of our grief, how much soever we live at ease. (2.) *He fasted and prayed*, not in public, he had no opportunity of doing that, but *before the God of heaven, who sees in secret, and will reward openly.* By his fasting and praying, (1.) He consecrated his sorrows, and directed his tears aright; sorrowed *after a godly sort*, with an eye to God, because his name was reproached in the contempt cast on his people, whose cause therefore he thus commits to him. (2.) He eased his sorrows, and unburdened his spirit, by pouring out his complaint before God, and leaving it with him. (3.) He took the right method of fetching in relief for his people, and direction for himself in what way to serve them. Let them who are forming any good designs for the service of the public, take God along with them from the first conception of them, and utter all their projects before him; that is the way to prosper in them.

5. And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant

nant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: 6. Let thine ear now be attentive and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night for the children of Israel, thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I, and my father's house have sinned. 7. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments which thou commandest thy servant Moses. 8. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, *If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations*:—9. But *if ye return unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there*. 10. Now these *are* thy servants, and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 11. O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants; who desire to fear thy name and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cup-bearer.

We have here Nehemiah's prayer; a prayer that has reference to all the prayers which he had for some time before been putting up to God day and night, while he continued his sorrows for the desolations of Jerusalem: and withal to the petition he was now intending to present to the king his master for his favour to Jerusalem.

We may observe in this prayer,

1. His humble and reverent address to him, in which he prostrates himself before him, and gives unto him the glory due unto his name, *ver. 5*. It is much the same with that of Daniel, *chap. ix. 4*. It teacheth us to draw near to God, (1.) With a holy awe of his majesty and glory; remembering that he is the God of heaven; infinitely above us, and sovereign Lord over us, and that he is *the great and terrible God*, infinitely excelling all the principalities and powers, both of the upper and of the lower world, angels and kings: and he is a God to be worshipped with fear by all his people, and whose powerful wrath all his enemies have reason to be afraid of. Even the terrors of the Lord are improveable, for the comfort and encouragement of those that trust in him. (2.) With a holy confidence in his grace and truth, for he *keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him*; not only for the mercy that is promised, but even more than he promised; nothing shall be thought too much to be done for them that *love him, and keep his commandments*.

2. His general request for the audience and acceptance of all the prayers and confessions he now made to God, *ver. 6*. *Let thine ear be attentive to the prayer, not which I say, (bare saying prayer will not serve) but which I pray before thee*: then we are like to speed in praying, when we pray *in* praying; and let *thine eyes be open upon the heart* from which the prayer comes, and the case which is in prayer laid before thee. God *formed the eye, and planted the ear*, and therefore shall he not see clearly? shall not he hear attentively?

3. His penitent confession of sin; not only Israel has sinned, it was no great mortification to him to own that, but *I and my father's house have sinned, ver. 6*. Thus doth he humble himself, and take shame to himself, in this confession; *we have* (I and my family among the rest have) *dealt very corruptly against thee, ver. 7*. In the confession of sin, let these two things be owned as the malignity of it, that it is a corruption of ourselves, and an affront to God; it is *dealing corruptly against God*, setting up the corruptions of our own hearts in opposition to the commands of God.

4. The pleas he urges for mercy from his people Israel. 1. He pleads what God had of old said to them, the rule he had settled of his proceedings towards them, which might be the rule of their expectations from him, *ver. 8, 9*. He had said indeed, that if they broke covenant with him, he would *scatter them among the nations*, and that threatening was fulfilled in their captivity; never was people so widely dispersed as Israel was at this time, though at first so closely incorporated; but he said withal, that if *they turned to him* (as now they began to do, having renounced idolatry and kept to the temple-service) he would *gather them again*. This he quotes from *Deut. xxx. 1—5*, and begs leave to put God in mind of it, (though the eternal mind needs no remembrance) as that which he guided his desires by, and grounded his faith and hope upon, in praying this prayer, *Remember I beseech thee, that word*; for thou hast said, *put me in remembrance*. He had owned, *ver. 7*. *We have not kept the judgments which thou commandest thy servant Moses*, yet begs, *ver. 8*. Lord, *remember the word which thou commandest thy servant Moses*; for the covenant is often said to be commanded: if God were not more mindful of his promises, than we are of his precepts, we were undone. Our best pleas therefore in prayer are those that are taken from the promise of God, *the word on which he has caused us to hope*, Psalm *cxix. 49*.

2. He pleads the relation wherein of old they stood to God, these are *thy servants and thy people, ver. 10*. whom thou hast set apart for thyself, and taken into covenant with thee: wilt thou suffer thy sworn enemies to trample upon and oppress thy sworn servants; if thou wilt not appear for thy people, whom wilt thou appear for? see *Isa. lxiii. 19*. As an evidence of their being God's servants, he gives them this character, *ver. 11*. *they desire to fear thy name*; they are not only called by the name, but really have a reverence for thy name; they now worship thee and thee only, according to thy will, and have an awe of all the discoveries thou art pleased to make of thyself; this they have a desire to do: which notes, (1.) Their good will to it: it is their constant care and endeavour to be found in the way of their duty, and they aim at it, though in many instances they come short. (2.) Their complacency in it: they take pleasure to fear thy name, so it may be read: not only do their duty, but do it with delight. Those shall graciously be accepted of God, that truly desire to fear his name; for those desires are his own work.

3. He pleads the great things God had formerly done for them, *ver. 10*. *whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power*, in the days of old, and thy power is still the same, wilt not thou therefore still redeem them, and perfect their redemption? Let not them be overpowered by the enemy, that live by God of infinite power on their side.

Lastly, He concludes with a particular petition, that God would prosper him in his undertaking, and give him favour with the king: *This man he calls him, for the greatest of men are but men before God; they must know themselves to be so, Psal. ix. 20*, and others must know them to be so, *who art thou that thou shouldst be afraid of a man? mercy in the sight of this man is what he prays for; meaning not the king's mercy, but mercy from God in his address to the king*. Favour with men is then comfortable, when we can see it springing from the mercy of God.

C H A P. II.

How Nehemiah wrestled with God and prevailed, we read in the foregoing chapter; now here we are told how like Jacob he prevailed with men also, and so found that his prayers were heard and answered. (1.) He prevailed with the king to send him to Jerusalem with a commission to build a wall about it, and grant him what was necessary for it, ver. 1—8. (2.) He prevailed against the enemies that would have obstructed him in his journey, ver. 9—11, and laughed him out of his undertaking, ver. 19, 20. He prevailed upon his own people to join with him in this good work: viewing the desolations of the walls, ver. 12—16, and then gaining them to lend every one a hand towards the rebuilding of them, ver. 17, 18. Thus did God own him in the work to which he called him.

1. **A**ND it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been before-time sad in his presence. 2. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid. 3. And said unto the King, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers sepulchres lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? 4. Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers sepulchres, that I may build it. 6. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a time. 7. Moreover, I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over, till I come into Judah; 8. And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

When Nehemiah had prayed for the relief of his countrymen, and perhaps in David's words, *Psal. li. 18*. *Build thou the walls of Jerusalem*, he did not sit still and say: let God now do his own work, for I have no more to do: but set himself to forecast it what he could do towards it. For our prayers must be seconded with our serious endeavours, else we mock God. Near four months passed from Chiffen to Nisan, from November to March, before Nehemiah made his application to the king for leave to go to Jerusalem; either because the winter was not a proper time for such a journey, and he would not make the motion till he could pursue it, or because it was so long before his month of waiting came, and there was no coming into the king's presence uncalled, *Ester iv. 11*. Now he attended the king's table he hoped to have his ear; we are not thus limited to certain moments in our addresses to the King of kings, but have liberty of access to him at all times: to the throne of grace we never come unseasonably. Now here is,

1. The occasion which he gave the king to inquire into his cares and griefs, by appearing sad in his presence. Those that speak to such great men, must not fall abruptly upon their business, but fetch a compass. Nehemiah would try whether he were in a good humour, before he ventured to tell him his errand, and this method he took to try him. He took up the wine and gave it to the king when he called for it, expecting that then he would look him in the face. He had not used to be sad in the king's presence, but conformed to the rules of the court (as courtiers must do) which would admit no sorrow, *Ester iv. 2*. Though he was a stranger, & captive, he was easy and pleasant. Good men should do what they can by their cheerfulness to convince the world of the pleasantness of religious ways, and to roll away the reproach cast upon them as melancholy, but there is a time for all things, *Eccles. iii. 4*. Nehemiah now saw cause both to be sad and to appear so. The miseries of Jerusalem gave him cause to be sad, and his shewing it will give occasion to the king to inquire into the cause; he did not dissemble sadness, for he was really in grief for the afflictions of Joseph, and was not like the hypocrites who *disfigure their faces*, yet he could have concealed his grief if it had been necessary, the heart knows its own bitterness, and in the midst of laughter is often sad, but it would now serve his purpose to discover his sadness. Though he had wine before him, and probably according to the office of the cup-bearer, did himself drink of it before he gave it to the king, yet it would not make his heart glad, while God's Israel was in distress.

2. The kind notice which the king took of his sadness, and the enquiry he made into the cause of it, *ver. 2*. *Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick?* Note, (1.) We ought from a principle of christian sympathy to concern ourselves in the sorrows and sadnesses of others, even of our inferiors, and not say, what is it to us! Let not masters despise their servants' griefs, but desire to make them easy. The great God is not pleased with the dejections and disquietments of his people, but would have them both *serve him with gladness and eat their bread with joy*. (2.) It is not strange if those

those that are sick have sad countenances, because of what is felt, and what is feared; sickness will make those grave that were most airy and gay: yet a good man, even in sickness may be of good cheer, if he know that his sins are forgiven. (3.) Freedom from sickness is so great a mercy, that while we have that, we ought not to be inordinately dejected under any outward burden; yet sorrow for our own sins, and the sins of others, and the calamities of God's church may well sadden the countenance, without sickness.

3. The account which Nehemiah gave the king of the cause of his sadness, which he gives with meekness and fear. (1.) With fear, he owns that now (though it appears by the following story he was a man of courage) *he was fore afraid*, perhaps of the king's wrath, for those eastern monarchs assumed an absolute power of life and death, *Dan. ii. 12, 13.—v. 19.* or misplacing a word, and was losing his request by the mismanagement of it; though he was a wise man, he was jealous of himself, lest he should say any thing imprudently; it becomes us to be so. A good assurance is indeed a good accomplishment, yet a humble self-diffidence is no man's dispraise. (2.) With meekness, without reflection upon any man, and with all the respect, deference, and good-will imaginable to the king his master, in these words, *Let the king live for ever*; he is wise and good, and the fittest man in the world to rule; he modestly asked, *Why should not my countenance be sad as it is*, (though I myself am well and at ease) *the city* (the king knew what city he meant) *the place of my father's sepulchres lieth waste?* Many are melancholy and sad, but can give no good reason for it, cannot tell why or wherefore; such should chide themselves for, and chide themselves out of their unjust and unreasonable griefs and fears: but Nehemiah could give so good a reason for his sadness, as to appeal to the king himself concerning it. Observe, (1.) He calls Jerusalem the *place of his father's sepulchres*, the place where his ancestors were buried; it is good for us to think often of our fathers' sepulchres: we are apt to dwell in our thoughts upon their honours and titles, their houses and estates, but let us think also of their sepulchres; and consider that they who had gone before us in the world, have also gone before us out of the world, and their monuments are mementos to us; and there is a great respect owing to the memory of our fathers, that that be not injured. All nations, even those that have had no expectation of the resurrection of the dead, have looked upon the sepulchres of their ancestors as in some degree sacred, and not to be violated. (2.) He justifies himself in his grief: I do well to be sad? why should I not be so? There is a time even for pious and prosperous men to be sad, and to shew it. The best men must not think to antedate heaven by banishing all sorrowful thoughts; it is a vale of tears we pass through, and we must submit to the temper of the climate. (3.) He assigns the ruins of Jerusalem as the true cause of his grief. Note, All the grievances of the church, but especially its desolations, are and ought to be matter of grief and sadness to all good people, to all that have a concern for God's honour, and that are living members of Christ's mystical body, and are of a public spirit; they favour even Zion's dust, *Psal. cii. 14.*

4. The encouragement which the king gave him to tell his mind, and the application he thereupon made in his heart to God, *ver. 4.* The king had an affection for him, and was not pleased to see him melancholy, and it is likely had a kindness for the Jews religion, he had discovered it before in the commission he gave to Ezra, who was a church-man, and now again in the power he put Nehemiah into, who was a statesman; wanting therefore only to know how he might be serviceable to Jerusalem, he asks this its careful friend, *For what dost thou make request?* something thou wouldst have, what is it? He was afraid to speak, *ver. 2.* but this gave him boldness; much more may the invitation Christ has given us to pray, and the promise that we shall speed, enable us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Nehemiah immediately *prayed to the God of heaven*, that he would give him wisdom to ask decently, and incline the king's heart to grant him his request. They that would find favour with kings, must secure the favour of the King of kings. He prayed to the God of heaven, as infinitely above even this mighty monarch. It was not a solemn prayer, he had not opportunity for that, but a secret sudden ejaculation, he lift up his heart to that God who understands the language of the heart, *Lord, give me a mouth and wisdom; Lord, give me favour in the sight of this man.* Note, It is good to be much in pious ejaculations, especially upon particular occasions; wherever we are, we have a way open heavenward; this will hinder no business, but further it rather; therefore let no business hinder this, but give rise to it rather. Nehemiah had prayed very solemnly with reference to this very occasion, *chap. i. 12.* yet when it comes to the push he prays again. Ejaculations and solemn prayers must not jumble out one another, but each have its place.

5. His humble petition to the king: when he had this encouragement, he presents it very modestly, and with submission to the king's wisdom, *ver. 5.* but very particularly: he asks for a commission to go governor to Judea, to build the wall of Jerusalem, and to stay there for a certain time, so many months we may suppose; and then either he had his commission renewed, or went back, and was sent again, so that he presided there twelve years at least, *chap. v. 13.* He also asked for a convoy, *ver. 7.* and an order upon the governors, not only to permit and suffer him to pass through their respective provinces, but to supply him with what he had occasion for: with another order upon the keeper of the forest of Lebanon, to give him timber for his work that he designed.

6. The king's great favour to him in asking him *when he would return*, *ver. 6.* He intimated that he would not lose him, nor could he long without him; yet to gratify him, and do a real office of kindness to his people, he would spare him a while, and let him have what clauses he pleased inserted in his commission, *ver. 8.* Here was an immediate answer to his prayer, for the seed of Jacob never sought the God of Jacob in vain. In the account he gives of the success of his petition, he takes notice, (1.) Of the presence of the queen, she sat by, *ver. 6.* which (they say) was not usual in the Persian court, (*Ester i. 11.*) Whether the queen was his back friend, that would have hindered him, and he observes it to the praise of God's powerful providence, that though she was by, yet he sped; or whether she was his true friend, and it is observed to the praise of God's kind providence, that she was present to help forward his request, is not certain. (2.) Of the power and grace of God. He gained his point according to his merit, his interest in the king, or his good management, but *according to the good hand of his God upon him.* Gracious souls take notice of God's hand, his good hand, in all events which turn in favour of them: *This is the Lord's doing*, and therefore doubly acceptable.

9. ¶ Then I came to the governors beyond the river: and gave them the king's letters. (Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.) 10. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. 11. So I came to Jerusalem, and

was there three days. 12. ¶ And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me, neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. 13. And I went out by night, by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon-well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. 14. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. 15. Then I went up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. 16. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did, neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work. 17. ¶ Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire: come and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem; that we be no more a reproach. 18. Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. 19. But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah, the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? 20. Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.

We are told,

1. How Nehemiah was dismissed by the court he was sent from; the king appointed captains of the army and horsemen to go with him, *ver. 9.* both for his guard, and to shew that he was a man whom the king did delight to honour, that all the king's servants might respect him accordingly. Whom the King of kings sends, he thus protects, he thus dignifies with an host of angels to attend them.

2. How he was received by the country he was sent to.

1. By the Jews and their friends at Jerusalem; we are told, (1.) That while he concealed his errand they took little notice of him; he was at Jerusalem three days, *ver. 11.* and it doth not appear that any of the great men of the city waited on him to congratulate his arrival, but he lay incognito; the king sent horsemen to attend him, but the Jews sent none to meet him, he had no beast with him, but that which he himself rode on, *ver. 12.* Wise men, and those who are worthy of double honour, yet covet not to come with observation, or make a show, to make a noise, no not when they come with the greatest blessings. They that shortly are to have the dominion in the morning, the world now knows not, but they lie hid, *1 John iii. 1.*

(2.) That though they took little notice of him, he took great notice of them and their state. He rose in the night and viewed the ruins of the walls, probably by moon-light, *ver. 13.* that he might see what was to be done, and in what method they must go about it, whether the old foundation would serve, and what there was of the old materials that would be of use. Note, 1. Good work is then like to be well done, when it is first well considered. 2. It is the wisdom of those who are engaged in public business, as much as may be to see with their own eyes, and not to proceed altogether upon the reports and representations of others, and yet to do this without noise, and, if possible, unobserved. 3. They that would build up the church's walls, must first take notice of the ruins of those walls. They that would know how to amend, must inquire what is amiss; what needs reformation, and what may serve as it is.

(3.) That when he discovered his design to the rulers and people they cheerfully concurred with him in it. He did not tell them at first what he came about, *ver. 16.* because he would not seem to do it for ostentation, and that if he found it impracticable he might retreat the more honourably; upright humble men will not found a trumpet before their arms, or any other their good offices. But when he had viewed and considered the thing, and probably felt the pulse of the rulers of the people, he told them what God had put into his heart, *ver. 12.* even to build up the wall of Jerusalem, *ver. 17.* Observe, (1.) How fairly he proposed it to them, *ye see the distress we are in*, how we lie exposed to the enemies that are round about us, how justly they reproach us, as foolish and despicable, how easily they may make a prey of us whenever they have a mind. Come therefore and let us build up the wall. He doth not undertake to do it without them. It could not be the work of one man; nor doth he charge and command imperiously, though he had the king's commission; but in a friendly brotherly way, exhorts and excites them to join with him in this work. To encourage them hereto he speaks of the design; (1.) As that which owed its original to the special grace of God. He takes not the praise of it to himself, as a good thought of his own, but acknowledgeth that God put it into his heart, and therefore they all ought to countenance it, whatever is of God must be promoted; and might hope to prosper in it, for what God puts men upon he will own them in. (2.) As that which owed its progress hitherto to the special providence of God. He produced the king's commission, told them how readily it was granted, and how forward the king was to favour his design, in which he saw the hand of his God good upon him. It would encourage both him and them to proceed in an undertaking which God had so remarkably smiled upon. Thus he proposed it to them; and, (2.) They presently came to a resolution, one and all, to concur with him, *let us rise up and build.* They are ashamed that they have sit still so long without so much as attempting this needful work, and resolve to rise up out of their slothfulness, to bestir themselves, and to stir up one another. Let us rise up, i. e. let us do it with vigour and diligence, and resolution, as those that are determined to go through with it. So they strengthened their hands, their own and one another's, for this good work. Note, 1. Many a good work would find hands enough to be laid to it, if there were but

but one good head to lead in it. They all saw the desolations of Jerusalem, yet none proposed the repair of them. But when Nehemiah proposed it, they all consented to it. It is pity a good motion should be lost purely for want of one to move it and to break the ice in it. 2. By stirring up ourselves and one another to that which is good, we strengthen ourselves and one another for it; for the great reason why we are weak in our duty, is because we are cold to it; indifferent and unresolved.

2. Let us now see how Nehemiah was received by those that wished ill to the Jews, whom God and his Israel blessed they cursed.

1. When he did but shew his face, it vexed them, *ver. 10.* Sanballat and Tobiah, two of the Samaritans, but by birth the former a Moabite, the latter an Ammonite, when they saw one come armed with a commission from the king to do service to Israel, it grieved them exceedingly, that all their little sneaking paltry arts to weaken Israel were thus baffled and frustrated, by a fair and noble and generous project to strengthen them. Nothing is a greater vexation to the enemies of good people, who have misrepresented them to princes as turbulent and factious, and not fit to live, than to see them stand right in the opinion of their rulers, their innocency cleared, and their reproach rolled away; and that they are thought not only fit to live, but fit to be trusted. When they saw a man come in that port, who professedly sought the welfare of the children of Israel, it vexed them to the heart; *The wicked shall see it and be grieved.*

2. When he began to act, they set themselves to hinder him, but in vain, *ver. 19, 20.* (1.) See here with what little reason the enemies discouraged them. They represented the undertaking as a silly thing, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us as foolish builders, that could not finish what we began. And as an ill thing, no better than treason, *will ye rebel against the king?* Because this was the whole invidious charge, though they had a commission from the king, and were taken under his protection, yet still they must be called rebels. (2.) See also with what good reason they slighted these discouragements. They bear up themselves with this, that they were the servants of the God of Heaven, the only true and living God, that they were acting for him in what they did, and that therefore he would bear them out, and prosper them, though the heathen raged, *Psal.*

ii. 1. They considered also, that the reason why these enemies did so malign them was, because they had no right in Jerusalem, but envied their right in it. Thus may the impotent menaces of the church's enemies be easily despised by the church's friends.

C H A P. III.

*Saying and doing are often two things; many are ready to say, Let us rise up and build, who sit still and do nothing; like that fair-spoken son who said, I go, Sir, but went not; the undertakers here were none of those. As soon as they had resolved to build the wall about Jerusalem, they lost no time, but set about it presently, as we find in this chapter. Let it never be said we left that good work to be done to-morrow, which we might as well have done to-day. This chapter gives us an account of two things, (1.) The names of the builders which are recorded here to their honour, for they were such as herein discovered a great zeal for God and their country; both a pious and a public spirit: a great degree both of industry and courage: and what they did was fit to be thus largely registered both for their praise, and for the encouragement of others to follow their example. (2.) The order of the building, they took it before them, and ended where they began. They repaired (1.) from the sheep-gate to the fish-gate, *ver. 1, 2.* (2.) Thence to the old-gate, *ver. 3—5.* (3.) Thence to the valley-gate, *ver. 6—12.* (4.) Thence to the dung-gate, *ver. 13.* (5.) Thence to the gate of the fountain, *ver. 14.* (6.) Thence to the water-gate, *ver. 15—26.* (7.) Thence by the horse-gate to the sheep-gate again, where they began, *ver. 27—32.* and so they brought their work quite round the city.*

1. **T**HEN Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep-gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel. 2. And next unto him builded the men of Jericho: and next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri. 3. But the fish-gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 4. And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz: and next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel: and next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. 5. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired: but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. 6. Moreover, the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah: they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 7. And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river. 8. Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths: next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. 9. And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. 10. And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house: and next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah. 11. Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahath-moab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. 12. And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohel, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. 13. The valley-gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah;

they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung-gate. 14. But the dung-gate repaired Malchiah the son of Recab, the ruler of part of Beth-haccerem: he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. 15. But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah: he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David. 16. After him repaired Nehemiah, the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Bethzur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty. 17. And after him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani: next unto him repaired Hashabiah the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part. 18. After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah. 19. And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury, at the turning of the wall. 20. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai, earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall, unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21. After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib, even to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22. And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain. 23. After him repaired Benjamin, and Hashub, over against their house: after him repaired Azariah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, by his house. 24. After him repaired Binnui, the son of Henadad, another piece, from the house of Azariah, unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner. 25. Palal the son of Uzi, over against the turning of the wall, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that was by the court of the prison; after him, Pedaiah the son of Parosh. 26. Moreover, the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water-gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out. 27. After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. 28. From above the horse-gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house. 29. After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer, over against his house: after him repaired also Shemaiah, the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east-gate. 30. After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece: after him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, over against his chamber. 31. After him repaired Malchiah, the goldsmith's son, unto the palace of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad; and to the going up of the corner. 32. And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep-gate, repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

The best way to know how to divide this chapter, is to observe how the work was divided among the undertakers that every one might know what he had to do, and mind it accordingly with a holy emulation, and desire to excel, yet without any contention, animosity, or separate interest. No strife appears among them, but which should do most for the public good.

Several things are observable in the account here given of the building of the wall about Jerusalem.

1. That Eliashib the high-priest, with his brethren the priests, led the van in this troop of builders, *ver. 1.* Ministers should be first and foremost in every good work, for their office obligeth them to teach and quicken by their example, as well as by their doctrine. If there be labour in it, who so fit as they to work? If danger, who so fit as they to venture? The dignity of the high-priest was very great, and obliged him to signalize himself in this service. The priests repaired the sheep-gate so called, because through it the sheep were brought that were to be sacrificed in the temple, and therefore the priests undertook the repair of it, whose inheritance the offerings of the Lord made by fire were. And of this gate only, it is said that they sanctified it with the word and prayer, and perhaps with sacrifices; either, (1.) Because it led to the temple; or, (2.) Because with this the building of the wall began, and it is probable (though they were at work in all parts of the wall at the same time) this was first finished, and therefore at this gate they solemnly committed their city and the walls of it to the divine protection. Or, (3.) Because the priests were the builders of it, and it becomes ministers above others, being themselves in a peculiar manner sanctified to God, to sanctify to him all their performances, and to do even their common actions after a godly sort.

2. That the undertakers were very many, who each took their share, some more and some less in this work, according as their ability was. Note, What is to be done for the public good, every one should assist in and farther to the utmost of his place and power; united force will conquer that which no one dares venture on. Many hands will make light work.

3. That many were active in this work who were not themselves inhabitants of Jerusalem, and therefore consulted purely the public welfare, and

and not any private interest or advantage of their own. Here are the men of Jericho with the first, *ver. 2.* the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, *ver. 7.* and Zanoah, *ver. 13.* Every Israelite should lend a hand towards the building up of Jerusalem.

4. That several rulers both of Jerusalem and of other cities were active in this work, thinking themselves bound in honour to do the utmost part their wealth and power enabled them to do for the furtherance of this good work. But it is observable they are called rulers of part, or the half part, of their respective cities. As one that was ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, *ver. 12.* Another of part of Beth-baccereim, *ver. 14.* Another part of Mizpah, *ver. 15.* Another of the half part of Beth-zur, *ver. 16.* One that was ruler of one half part, and another of the other half part of Keilah, *ver. 17, 18.* Perhaps the Persian government would not intrust any one with a strong city, but appointed two to be a watch upon each other. Rome had two consuls.

5. Here is a just reproach fastened upon the nobles of Tekoah, that they put not their necks to the work of their Lord, *ver. 5. i. e.* they would not come under the yoke of an obligation to this service; as if the dignity and liberty of their peerage were their discharge from serving God and doing good, which is indeed the highest honour and truest freedom. Let not nobles think any thing below them, by which they may advance the interests of their country, for what else is their nobility good for, but that it puts them in a higher and larger sphere of usefulness, than that in which inferior persons move.

6. Two undertakers joined in repairing the old gate, *ver. 6.* and so were confounders, and shared the honour of it between them. The good work we cannot compass ourselves, we must be thankful to those that will go partners with us in. Some think this is called the old gate, because remaining of the ancient Salem, and said to be first built by Melchizedek.

7. Several good honest tradesmen, as well as priests and rulers, were active in this work, goldsmiths, apothecaries, merchants, *ver. 8. 32.* They did not think their callings excused them, nor plead that they could not leave their shops to attend the public business, knowing that what they lost would certainly be made up to them by the blessing of God upon their callings.

8. Some ladies are spoken of as helping forward this work, *Shallum and his daughters, ver. 12,* who though not capable of personal service, yet having their portions in their own hands, or being rich widows, contributed money for buying materials and paying workmen. St. Paul speaks of some good women that laboured with him in the gospel, *Phil. iv. 3.*

9. Of some it is said, that they repaired over against their houses, *ver. 10, 23, 29,* and of one who, it is likely, was only a lodger, that he repaired over against his chamber, *ver. 30.* When a general good work is to be done, each should apply themselves to that part of it that falls nearest them, and within their reach. If every one will sweep before his own door, the street will be clean; if every one will mend one we shall be all mended. If he that has but a chamber will repair before that, he doth his part.

10. Of one it is said, that he earnestly repaired that which fell to his share, *ver. 20.* with an inflamed zeal: not that others were cold or indifferent, but he was the most vigorous of any of them, and made himself remarkable for it. It is good to be thus zealously affected in a good thing; and it is probable, this good man's zeal provoked very many to take the more pains and make the more haste.

11. Of one of these builders it is observed, that he was the sixth son of his father, *ver. 30.* His five elder brethren, it seems laid not their hand to this work, but he did. In doing that which is good, we need not stay to see our betters go before us; if they decline it, it doth not therefore follow that we must. Thus the younger brother, if he be the better man, and doth God and his generation better service, is indeed the better gentleman; those are most honourable that are most useful.

12. Some of them that had first done helped their fellows, and undertook another share, where they saw there was most need. Meremoth repaired, *ver. 4.* and again, *ver. 21.* And the Tekoites, besides the piece they repaired, *ver. 5.* undertook another piece, *ver. 27.* which is the more remarkable, because their nobles set them an ill example by withdrawing from the service; which, instead of serving them for an excuse to sit still, perhaps made them the more forward to do a double work, that by their zeal they might either shame or atone for the covetousness and carelessness of their nobles.

Lastly, Here is no mention of any particular share that Nehemiah himself had in this work. A name-sake of his is mentioned, *ver. 16.* But did he do nothing? yes, though he undertook not any particular piece of the wall, yet he did more than any of them, for he had the oversight of them all; half of his servants worked where there was most need, and the other half stood centinel, as we find after, *chap. iv. 16.* while he himself in his own person walked the rounds, directed and encouraged the builders, set his hand to the work where he saw occasion, and kept a watchful eye upon the motions of the enemy, as we shall find in the next chapter. The pilot needs not hale at a rope, it is enough for him to steer.

C H A P. IV.

We left all hands at work for the building of the wall about Jerusalem.

But such good work doth not rise to be carried on without opposition; now here we are told what opposition was given to it, and what methods Nehemiah betook to forward the work, notwithstanding that opposition. (1.) The enemies reproached and ridiculed their undertaking; but their scoffs they answered with prayers, heeded them not, but went on with their work notwithstanding, ver. 1—6. (2.) They formed a bloody design against them, to hinder them by force of arms, ver. 7, 9, 10, 11, 12. And to guard against this, Nehemiah prayed, ver. 9. set guards, ver. 13. and encouraged them to fight, ver. 14. by which the design was broken, ver. 15. and so the work was carried on with all needful precaution against a surprise, ver. 16—23. In all this Nehemiah approved himself a man of great conduct and courage, as well as great piety.

1. **B**UT it came to pass that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2. And he spake before his brethren, and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? 3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which

they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. 4. Hear, O our God: for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: 5. And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. 6. So built we the wall: and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work.

Here is, 1. The spiteful scornful reflection which Sanballat and Tobiah cast upon the Jews, for their attempt to build the wall about Jerusalem. The country rang of it presently, intelligence was brought of it to Samaria, that nest of enemies to the Jews and their prosperity; and here we are told how they received the tidings. (1.) In heart they were very angry at the undertaking, and had great indignation, *ver. 1.* It vexed them that Nehemiah came to seek their welfare, *chap. ii. 20.* but when they heard of this great undertaking for their good, they were out of all patience. They had hitherto pleased themselves with the thoughts that while Jerusalem was unwall'd, they could swallow it up, and make themselves masters of it when they pleased; but if it be walled, it will not only be fenced against them, but by degrees become formidable to them. The strength and safety of the church is the grief and vexation of its enemies. (2.) In word they despised it, and made it the subject of their ridicule, in which they did sufficiently spit their venom; but good was brought out of it, for looking upon it as a foolish undertaking that would sink under its own weight, they did not go about to obstruct it till it was too late. Let us see with what pride and malice they set themselves publicly to banter it. (1.) Sanballat speaks with scorn of the workmen, *their feeble Jews, ver. 3.* What will they do for materials? *will they revive the stones out of the rubbish?* And what mean they to be so hasty? Do they think to make the walling of a city but one day's work? and to keep the feast of dedication with sacrifice the next day; poor silly people! see how ridiculous they make themselves; (2.) Tobiah speaks with no less scorn of the work itself. He has his stout too, and must shew his wit, *ver. 3.* Profane scoffers sharpen one another. Sorry work, saith he, they are like to make of it: they themselves will be ashamed of it, *if a fox go up,* not with his subtilty, but with his weight, *he will break down their stone wall.* Many a good work has been thus looked upon with contempt by the proud and haughty scornors.

2. Nehemiah's humble and devout address to God when he heard of these reflections. He had notice brought him what they said; it is probable they themselves sent him a message to this purpose to discourage him, hoping to jeer him out of his attempt; but he did not answer these fools according to their folly; did not upbraid them with their weakness, but looked up to God by prayer. (1.) He begs of God to take notice of the indignities that were done them, *ver. 4.* and in this we are to imitate him. *Hear, O our God, for we are despised.* Note, 1. God's people have often been a despised people, and loaded with contempt. 2. God doth and will hear all the slights that are put upon his people, and it is their comfort that he doth so, and a good reason why they should be as deaf, *Psal. xxxviii. 13, 15.* Thou art our God to whom we appeal; our cause needs no more but a fair hearing. (2.) He begs of God to avenge their cause, and turn the reproach upon the enemies themselves, *ver. 4, 5.* and this was spoken rather by a spirit of prophecy, than by a spirit of prayer, and is not to be imitated by us who are taught of Christ to pray for them that despitefully use and persecute us; Christ himself prayed for those that reproached him, *Father, forgive them.* Nehemiah here prays, *cover not their iniquity.* Note, 1. They that cast contempt on God's people, do but prepare everlasting shame for themselves. 2. It is a sin from which sinners are seldom recovered. Doubtless, Nehemiah had reason to think the hearts of those sinners were desperately hardened, so that they would never repent of it, else he would not have prayed that it might never be blotted out. The reason he gives is, not that they have abused us, but *they have provoked thee,* and that *before the builders,* to whom it is likely they sent a spiteful message. Note, Therefore we should be angry at the malice of persecutors, not because it is abusive to us, but because it is offensive to God; and on that we may ground an expectation that God will appear against it, *Psal. lxxiv. 18. 22.*

3. The vigour of the builders, notwithstanding these reflections, *ver. 6.* They made such good speed that in a little time they had run up the wall to half its height, for the people had a mind to work, their hearts were upon it, and they would have it forward. Note, 1. Then good work goes on well, when people have a mind to it. 2. The reproaches of enemies should rather quicken to our duty than drive us from it.

7. ¶ But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth. 8. And conspired all of them together, to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night because of them. 10. And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of the burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall. 11. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. 12. And it came to pass that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places, where ye shall return unto us, they will be upon you. 13. ¶ Therefore set I in the lower places, behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the LORD which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. 15. And it

came to pass when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.

We have here,

1. The conspiracy which the Jews enemies formed against them, to stay the building by slaying the builders. The conspirators were not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but other neighbouring people whom they had drawn into the plot. They flattered themselves with a fancy that the work should soon stand still of itself, but when they heard that it went on and prospered, they were angry at the Jews for being so hasty to push the work forward, and angry at themselves for being so slow in opposing it, *ver. 4. they were very wroth. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel.* Nothing would serve but they would fight against Jerusalem, *ver. 8.* Why, what quarrel had they with the Jews? had they done them any wrong? or did they design them any? No, they lived peaceably by them; but it was merely out of envy and malice; they hated the Jews piety, and were therefore vexed at their prosperity, and sought their ruin. Observe, (1.) How unanimous they were; *They conspired all of them together*, though of different interests among themselves, yet one in their opposition to the work of God. (2.) How close they were; they said, *they shall not know, neither see*, till we have them at our mercy. Thus they took crafty counsel, and digged deep to hide it from the Lord, and promised themselves security and success from the secrecy of their management. (3.) How cruel they were; *we will come and slay them.* If nothing less than the murder of the workmen will put a stop to the work, they will not stick at that; nay, it is their blood they thirst for, and they are glad of any pretence to glut themselves with it. (1.) What the design was, and how confident they were of success; it was to *cause the work to cease*, *ver. 11.* and this they doubted not but to effect. The hindering of good work is that which bad men aim at and promise themselves; but good work is God's work; and it shall prosper.

2. The discouragements which the builders themselves laboured under. At the same time when the adversaries said, *Let us cause the work to cease: Judah said, Let us even let it fall, for we are not able to go forward with it, ver. 10.* They represent the labourers tired off their legs, and the remaining difficulties insuperable, even of that first part of their work the removing of the rubbish, and therefore think it advisable to desist for the present. Can Judah, that warlike valiant tribe, sneak thus? Active leading men have many times as much ado to grapple with the fears of their friends, as with the terrors of their enemies.

3. The information that was brought to Nehemiah of the enemies designs, *ver. 12.* There were Jews that dwelt by them, in the country, who though they had not zeal enough to bring them to Jerusalem to help their brethren in building the wall, yet having by their situation opportunity to discover the enemies motions, they had so much honesty and affection to the cause, as to give intelligence of it; nay, that it might be the more credited, they came themselves to give notice of it; and they said it ten times, repeating it as men in earnest, and under a concern, and the report was confirmed by many witnesses; the intelligence they gave is expressed abruptly, and finds work for the critics, to make out the sense of it; which perhaps is designed to intimate, that they gave this intelligence as men out of breath and in confusion, whose very looks would make up the deficiencies of their words. I think it may be read without any supply, *whatsoever place ye turn to they are against us*, so that you have need to be upon your guard on all sides. Note, God has many ways of bringing to light, and so bringing to nought the devices and designs of his and his church's enemies; even the cold and feeble Jews that contentedly dwell by them, shall be made to serve as spies upon them; nay, rather than fail, *a bird of the air shall carry their voice.*

4. The pious and prudent methods which Nehemiah hereupon took to baffle the design, and to secure his work and workmen; it is said, *ver. 14. he looked.* (1.) He looked up, engaged God for him, and put himself and his cause under the divine protection, *ver. 9. we made our prayer unto our God.* That was the way of this good man, and should be our way; all his cares, all his griefs, all his fears, he spread before God, and thereby made himself easy. This was the first thing he did; before he used any means he made his prayer to God, for with him we must always begin. (3.) He looked about him. Having prayed, he set a watch against them. The instructions Christ has given us in our spiritual warfare, agree with this example, *Matt. xxvi. 41. Watch and pray.* If we think to secure ourselves by prayer only, without watchfulness, we are slothful, and tempt God. If by watchfulness, without prayer, we are proud, and slight God; and either way we forfeit his protection.

Observe, (1.) How he posted the guards, *ver. 13.* In the lower places he set them behind the wall, that they might annoy the enemy over it, as a breast-work: but in the higher places, where the wall was raised to its full height, he set them upon it, that from the top of it they might throw down stones or darts upon the heads of the assailants; he set them after their families, that mutual relation might engage them to mutual assistance. (2.) How he animated and encouraged them, *ver. 14.* He observed even the nobles and rulers themselves, as well as the rest of the people, to be under a great consternation upon the intelligence that was brought them, and ready to say they were all undone, by which their hands were weakened both for work and war, and therefore he endeavours to silence their fears; Come (saith he) *be not afraid of them*, but behave yourselves valiantly, considering, (1.) Who you fight under; you cannot have a better captain, *remember the Lord who is great and terrible*; you think your enemies great and terrible, but what are they in comparison with God, especially in opposition to him? he is great above them to control them, and will be terrible to them when he comes to reckon with them. Those that with an eye of faith see the churches God great and terrible, will see the church's enemies mean and despicable. The reigning fear of God is the best antidote against the enslaving fear of man. He that is afraid of a man that shall die, forgets the Lord his maker, *Isa. li. 12, 13.* (2.) Who you fight for, you cannot have a better cause, you fight for your brethren, (*Psal. cxxii. 3.*) your sons and your daughters. All that is dear to you in this world lies at stake, therefore *behave yourselves valiantly.*

5. The happy disappointment which this gave to the enemy, *ver. 15.* When they found their design was discovered, and that the Jews were upon their guard, they concluded it was to no purpose to attempt any thing, but that God had brought their counsel to nought. They knew they could not gain their point but by surprise, and if their plot was known, it was quashed. The Jews hereupon returned every one to his work with so much the more cheerfulness, because they saw plainly that God owned it, and owned them in the doing of it. Note, God's care of our safety should engage and encourage us to go on with vigour in our duty. As soon as ever a danger is over, let us return to our work, and trust God another time.

16. And it came to pass from that time forth, that

the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. 17. They which builded on the wall, and they that bear burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. 18. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded; and he that sounded the trumpet was by me. 19. ¶ And I said unto the nobles and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. 20. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. 21. So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears, from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. 22. Likewise at the same time, said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem; that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. 23. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

When the builders had so far reason to think the design of the enemies broken, as to return to their work, yet they were not so secure as to lay down their arms, knowing how restless, and unwearied they were in their attempts, and if one design failed they would be hatching another. Thus must we watch always against our spiritual enemies, and not expect that our warfare will be accomplished till our work is. See what course Nehemiah took that the people might hold themselves in readiness, in case there should be an attack:

1. While one half was at work, the other half was under their arms, holding spears, and shields and bows, not only for themselves but for the labourers too, who would immediately quit their work, and betake themselves to their weapons upon the first alarm, *ver. 10.* And it is probable, they changed services at such and such hours, which would relieve the fatigue of both, and particularly would be an ease to the bearers of burdens, whose strength was decayed, *ver. 10.* while they held the weapons they were eased and yet not idle. They thus dividing their time between the trowels and the spears, are said to work with one hand, and held their weapons with the other, *ver. 27.* which cannot be understood literally, for the work would require both hands, but it intimates that they were equally employed in both. Thus must we work out our salvation with the weapons of our warfare in our hand, for in every duty we must expect to meet with opposition from our spiritual enemies against whom we must still be fighting the good fight of faith.

2. Every builder had a sword by his side, *ver. 18.* that he could carry without hindering his labour. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, which we ought to have always at hand, and never to seek, both in our labours, and in our conflicts as christians.

3. Care was taken both to get and to give early notice of the approach of the enemy, in case they should endeavour to surprise them. Nehemiah kept a trumpeter always by him to sound an alarm upon the first intimation of danger. The work was large, and the builders were dispersed; for in all parts of the wall they were labouring at the same time. Nehemiah continually walked round to oversee the work and encourage the workmen, and so would have speedy intelligence if the enemy made an attack, of which by sound of trumpet he would soon give notice to all, and they must immediately repair to him with a full assurance that their God would fight for them, *ver. 18, 19, 20.* When they acted as workmen, it was requisite they should be dispersed wherever there was work to do; but when as soldiers, it was requisite they should come into close order, and be found in a body. Thus should the labourers in Christ's building, be ready to unite against a common foe.

4. The inhabitants of the villages were ordered to lodge within Jerusalem, with their servants, not only that they might be the nearer to their work in the morning, but that they might be ready to help in case of an attack in the night, *ver. 22.* The strength of a city lies more in its hands than in its walls, secure them and God's blessing upon them, and be secure.

5. Nehemiah himself, and all his men, kept close to their business. The spears were held up with the sight of them to terrify the enemy, not only from sun to sun, but from twilight to twilight every day, *ver. 21.* Thus ought we to be always upon our guard against our spiritual enemies, not only (as here) while it is light but when it is dark, for they are the rulers of the darkness of this world. Nay, so very intent was Nehemiah upon his work, and so fast did he hold his servants to it, that while the heat of the business lasted, neither he himself, nor his attendants, went into bed, but every night lay and slept in their clothes, *ver. 23.* except that they shifted them now and then, either for cleanliness, or in a case of ceremonial pollution. It was a sign their heart was upon their work, when they could not find time to dress and undress, but resolved they would be at all times ready for service. Then good work is likely to go on successfully, when those that labour in it thus make a business of it.

C H A P. V.

How bravely Nehemiah, as a wise and faithful governor, stood upon his guard against the attacks of enemies abroad, we read in the foregoing chapter. Here we have him no less bold and active to redress grievances at home, and having kept them from being destroyed by their enemies, to keep them from destroying one another. Here is, (1.) The complaint which the poor made to him, of the great hardships which the rich (of whom they were forced to borrow money) put upon them, *ver. 1—5.* (2.) The effectual course which Nehemiah took both to reform the oppressors, and to relieve the oppressed, *ver. 6—13.* (3.) The good example which he himself, as governor, set them of compassion and tenderness, *ver. 14—19.*

1. **A**ND there was a great cry of the people, and of their wives, against their brethren the Jews. 2. For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters

ters are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat and live. 3. Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. 4. There were also said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. 5. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children, and lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters, to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already, neither is it in our power to redeem them: for other men have our lands and vineyards.

We have here the tears of the oppressed, which Solomon considered, *Eccles. iv. 1.* And let us consider them as here they are dropped before Nehemiah, whose office it was, as governor, to deliver the poor and needy, and rid them out of the hand of the wicked oppressors, *Psal. lxxxii. 4.* Hard times and hard hearts made the poor miserable.

1. The times they lived in were hard. There was a dearth of corn, *ver. 3.* probably for want of rain, with which God had chastised their neglect of his house, *Hag. i. 11.* and the non-payment of their church-dues, *Mal. iii. 9, 10.* Thus foolish sinful men bring God's judgments upon themselves, and then fret and complain of them. When the markets are high, and provisions scarce and dear, the poor soon feel from it, and are pinched by it. Blessed be God for the mercy, and God deliver us from the sin of fullness of bread, *Ezek. xvi. 49.* That which made the scarcity here complained of the more grievous, was, that their sons and their daughters were many, *ver. 2.* The families that were most necessitous were most numerous; here were the mouths, but where was the meat? Some have estates and no children to inherit them, others have children and no estates to leave them; those that have both have reason to be thankful; those that have neither may the better be content; those who have great families and little substance, must learn to live by faith in God's providence and promise; and those who have little families and great substance, must make their abundance a supply for others want. But this was not all, as corn was dear, so the taxes were high; the king's tribute must be paid, *ver. 4.* This mark of their captivity still remained upon them. Perhaps it was a poll-money that was required, and then their sons and their daughters being many, it rose the higher. The more they had to maintain (a hard case!) the more they had to pay. Now it seems they had not wherewithal of their own to buy corn and pay taxes, but were necessitated to borrow. Their families came poor out of Babylon, they had been at great expence in building them houses, and had not yet, as we say, got up their backs, when these new burdens came upon them. The straits of poor housekeepers that make hard shift to get an honest livelihood, and sometimes wait what is fitting for them and their families, are well worthy the compassionate consideration of those, that either with their wealth, or with their power, are in a capacity to help them.

2. The persons they dealt with were hard. Money must be had, but it must be borrowed, and they that lent them money, taking advantage of their necessity, were very hard upon them, and made a prey of them. (1.) They exacted interest from them, at twelve per cent. the hundredth part every month, *ver. 12.* If men borrow large sums to trade with to increase their stocks, or purchase land, there is no reason but the lender should share with the borrower in his profit, or if to spend upon their lusts, or repair what they have so spent, why should not they pay for their extravagancies? But if the poor borrow to maintain their families, and we are able to help them, it is certain we ought either to lend freely what they have occasion for, or (if they be not likely to repay it) to give freely something towards it. Nay, (2.) They forced them to mortgage to them their lands and houses for the security of the money, *ver. 3.* and not only so, but took the profits of them for interest, (*ver. 5.* compare *ver. 11.*) that by degrees they might make themselves masters of all they had. Yet this was not the worst. (3.) They took their children for bond-servants, to be enslaved or sold at pleasure, *ver. 5.* This they complain of most sensibly, as that which touched them in a tender part, and aggravate it with this, our children are as their children, as dear to us as theirs are to them; not only of the same human nature, and intitled to the honours and liberties of that, (*Mal. ii. 10. Job xxxi. 15.*) but of the same holy nation, free-born Israelites, and dignified with the same privileges. Our flesh carries in it the sacred seal of the covenant of circumcision, as well as the flesh of our brethren, yet our heirs must be their slaves, and it is not in our power to redeem them. This they make a humble remonstrance of to Nehemiah, not only because they saw he was a great man that could relieve them, but a good man that would. Whither should the injured poor flee for succour but to the shields of the earth? whither but to the chancery, to the charity in the royal breast, and those deputed by it, for relief against the *summum jus*, the extremity of the law?

We will leave Nehemiah hearing the complaint, and inquiring into the truth of the complainants allegations (for the clamours of the poor are not always just) while we sit down and look, (1.) With a gracious compassion upon the oppressed, and lament the hardships which many in the world are groaning under, putting our souls into their souls stead, and remembering in our prayers and succours them that are burdened, as burdened with them. (2.) With a gracious indignation at the oppressors, and envy against their pride and cruelty, who drink the tears, the blood of those they have under their feet. But let those who shew no mercy, expect judgment without mercy. It was an aggravation of the sin of these oppressing Jews, that they were themselves so lately delivered out of the house of bondage, which obliged them in gratitude to undo the heavy burden, *Isa. lviii. 6.*

6. ¶ And I was very angry, when I heard their cry, and these words. 7. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles and the rulers, and said unto them, You exact usury every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. 8. And I said unto them, We, after our ability, have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. 9. Also I said, It is not good that ye do; ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? 10. I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants might exact of them money and corn; I pray you let us leave off this usury. 11.

Restore, I pray you, to them even to this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine and the oil, that ye exact of them. 12. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. 13. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.

It should seem the foregoing complaint was made to Nehemiah, at the time when he had his head and hands as full as possible of the public business about building the wall; yet perceiving it to be just, he did not reject it because it was unreasonable: did not chide the petitioners, nor fall into a passion with him for disturbing him, when they saw how much he had to do; a fault which men of business are too often guilty of: no, nor did he so much as adjourn the hearing of the causes or proceedings upon it till he had more leisure. The case called for speedy interposal, and therefore he applied himself immediately to the consideration of it, knowing, that let him build Jerusalem's walls never so high, so thick, so strong, the city could no be safe while such abuses as these were tolerated.

Now observe, What method he took for the redress of this grievance, which was so threatening to the public.

1. He was very angry, *ver. 6.* he expressed a great displeasure at it, as a very ill thing. Note, It well becomes rulers to shew themselves angry at sin, that by the anger itself they may be excited to their duty, and by the expressions of it others may be deterred from ill.

2. He consulted with himself, *ver. 7.* By this it appears his anger was not excessive, but kept within bounds, that though his spirit was provoked, he did not say or do any thing unadvisedly. Before he rebuked the nobles, he consulted with himself what to say, and when, and how. Note, Reproofs must be given with great consideration, and what is well meant may not come short of its end, for want of being well managed; It is the reproach of instruction that giveth life. Even wise men lose the benefit of their wisdom sometimes for want of consulting with themselves, and taking time to deliberate.

3. He rebuked the nobles and rulers, who were the monied men, and whose power perhaps made them the more bold to oppress. Note, Even nobles and rulers, if they do that which is ill, ought to be told of it by proper persons. Let no man imagine that his dignity sets him above reproof.

4. He set a great assembly against them, called the people together to be witnesses of what he said, and to bear their testimony (which the people will generally be forward to do) against the oppressions and extortions their rulers were guilty of. Ezra and Nehemiah were both of them very wise, good, useful men, yet in cases not unlike there was a great deal of difference between their management; when Ezra was told of the sin of the rulers in marrying strange wives, he rent his clothes, and wept, and prayed, and was hardly persuaded to attempt a reformation, fearing it impracticable, for he was a man of a mild tender spirit. When Nehemiah was told of as ill a thing, he warmed presently, fell foul upon the delinquents, incensed the people against them, and never rested till by all the rough methods he could use, he forced them to reform; for he was a man of a hot and eager spirit. Note, 1. Very holy men may differ much from each other in their natural temper, and in other things that result from it. 2. God's work may be done, well done, and successfully, and yet different methods taken in doing of it; which is a good reason why we should neither arraign others management, nor make our own a standard. There are diversities of operation, but the same Spirit.

5. He fairly reasoned the case with them, and shewed them the evil of what they did; the regular way of reforming men's lives, is to endeavour in the first place to convince their consciences. Several things he offered to their consideration, which are so pertinent and just, that it appeared he had consulted with himself. He lays it before them, (1.) That those whom they oppressed were their brethren, you exact every one of his brother; it was bad enough to oppress strangers, but much worse to oppress their poor brethren, from whom the divine law did not allow them to take any usury, *Dent. xxiii. 19, 20.* (2.) That they were but lately redeemed out of the hand of the heathen: the body of the people was so by the wonderful providence of God: some particular persons among them were so, who besides their share in the general captivity, were in servitude to heathen masters, and ransomed at the charge of Nehemiah and other pious and well-disposed persons; now, faith he, have we taken all this pains to get their liberty out of the hands of the heathen, and shall their own rulers enslave them? What an absurd thing is this! Must we be at the same trouble and expence to redeem them from you, as we were to redeem them from Babylon? *ver. 8.* Those whom God by his grace has made free, ought not to be again brought under a yoke of bondage, *Gal. v. 1. 1 Cor. vii. 23.* (3.) That it was a great sin thus to oppress the poor, *ver. 9.* It is not good that ye do, though you get money by it, you contract guilt by it, and ought ye not to walk in the fear of God? Certainly you ought, for you profess religion, and relation to him; and if you do, you will not be either covetous of worldly gain, or cruel towards your brethren. They that walk in the fear of God will not dare to do an ill thing, *Job xxxi. 13, 14, 23.* (4.) That it was a great scandal, and a reproach to their profession; consider the reproach of the heathen our enemies; enemies to us, to our God, and to our holy religion. They will be glad of any occasion to speak against us, and this will give them great occasion; they will say, these Jews that profess so much devotion to God; see how barbarous they are one to another. Note, 1. All that profess religion should be very careful that they do nothing to expose themselves to the reproach of them that are without, lest religion be wounded through their sides. 2. Nothing exposes religion more to the reproach of its enemies, than the worldliness and hard-heartedness of the professors of it. (5.) That he himself had set them a better example, *ver. 10.* which he enlargeth upon afterwards, *ver. 14, &c.* They that rigorously insist upon their right themselves, will with a very ill grace persuade others to recede from theirs.

6. He earnestly pressed them not only not to make their poor neighbours any more such hard bargains, but to restore that which they had got into their hands, *ver. 11.* See how familiarly he speaks to them, Let us leave off this usury, putting himself in, as become reprovers, though far from being any way guilty of the crime. See how earnestly and yet humbly he persuades them, I pray you leave off; and I pray you restore; though he had authority to command, yet for love's sake he rather beseeches. See how particularly he presseth them to be kind to the poor, give them up their mortgages,

gages, put them again in possession of their estates, remit the interest, and give them time to pay in the principal. He urged them to the loss, yet urging them to their duty, it would be at length to their advantage. What we charitably forgive will be remembered and recompensed, as well as what we charitably give.

7. He laid them under all the obligations possible to do what he pressed them to. (1.) He got a promise from them, *ver. 12. We will restore them.* (2.) He sent for the priests to give them their oath, that they would perform this promise; now their convictions were strong, and they seemed resolved, he would keep them to it. (3.) He bound them by a solemn curse or execration, hoping that would strike some awe upon them, *So let God shake out every man that performeth not this promise, ver. 13.* This was a threatening that he would certainly do so, to which the people said Amen, as to those curses at mount Ebal; *Deut. xxvii.* That their throats might be cut with their own tongues, if they should falsify their engagement, and that by the dread of that they might be kept to their promise; with this Amen the people praised the Lord; so far were they from promising with regret that they promised with all possible expressions of joy and thankfulness. Thus David when he took God's vows upon him, *sung and gave praise, Psal. lvi. 12.* This here was well, but that which follows was better; they did according to this promise, and stuck to what they had done, not as their uncessors in a like case, who re-enslaved those whom a little before they had released, *Jer. xxxiv. 10, 11, 18.* Good promises are good things, but good performances are all in all.

14. ¶ Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year, even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, *that is, twelve years,* I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. 15. But the former governors that had been before me, were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver: yea even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. 16. Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work. 17. Moreover, there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, besides those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. 18. Now that which was prepared for me daily, was one ox, and six choice sheep: also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. 19. Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah had mentioned his own practice as an inducement to the nobles not to burden the poor, no not with just demands; but he relates more particularly what his practice was, not in pride or vain-glory, or to pass a compliment upon himself, but as an inducement both to his successors, and to the inferior magistrates, to be as tender as might be of the peoples ease.

1. He intimates what had been the way of his predecessors, *ver. 15.* He doth not name them, because what he had to say of them was not to their honour, and in such a case it is good to spare names; but the people knew how chargeable they had been, and how dear the country paid for all the benefit of their government. The government allows them forty shekels of silver, which was near five pounds, so much a day (it is probable;) but besides that they obliged the people to furnish them with bread and wine, insisting upon it as perquisites of their office, and not only so, but they suffered their servants to squeeze the people, and to get all they could out of them. Note, 1. It is no new thing, for those who are in public places to seek themselves more than the public welfare, nay, and to serve themselves upon the public loss. 2. Matters must be accountable for all the acts of fraud and injustice, violence and oppression, which they connive at in their servants.

2. He tells us what had been his way. In general, he had not done as the former governors did, he would not, he durst not, *because of the fear of God.* He had an awe of God's majesty and a dread of his wrath. And, (1.) That restrained him from oppressing the people; those that truly fear God, will not dare to do anything cruel or unjust. (3.) It was purely that which restrained him: he was thus generous, not that he might have praise of men, or serve a turn by his interest in the people, but purely for conscience sake, because of the fear of God; that will not only be a powerful, but an acceptable principle both of justice and charity. What a good hand his predecessors made of their place, appeared by the estates they raised, but Nehemiah for his part got nothing, but the satisfaction of doing good, *neither bought we any land, ver. 16.* Say not then he was an ill husband, but that he was a good governor, who aimed not to feather his own nest.

Let us remember the word of our Lord, how he said, *it is more blessed to give than to receive, Acts xx. 35.* And observe here, (1.) How little Nehemiah received of what he might have required, he did the work of the governor, but he did not eat the bread of the governor, *ver. 14.* did not require it, *ver. 16.* So far was he from extorting more than his due, that he never demanded that, but lived upon what he had got in the king of Persia's court, and his own estate in Judea; and the reason he gives for this piece of self-denial is, *because the bondage was heavy upon the people.* He might have used the common excuse for rigour in such cases, that it would be wrong to his successors not to demand his dues; but let them look to themselves, he considers the present state of the Jews; and while they groaned under so much hardship, he could not find in his heart to add to their burden, but would rather lessen his own estate than ruin them. Note, In our demands we must consider not only the justice of them, but the ability of those on whom we make them; where there is nothing to be had, we know not who loses his right. (2.) How much he gave, which he might have withheld. 1. His servants work, *ver. 16.* The servants of princes think themselves excused from labour, but Nehemiah's servants, by his order no doubt, were all gathered to the work. Those that have many servants, should contrive how they may do good with them, and keep them well employed. 2. His own meat, *ver. 17, 18.* He kept a very good table, not on certain days, but constantly; he had many honourable guests, at least one hundred and fifty of his own countrymen, persons of the first rank, besides stran-

gers that came to him upon business; and he had plentiful provisions for his guests, beef, and mutton, and fowl, and all sorts of wine. Let those in public places remember that they were preferred to do good, and not to enrich themselves, and let lesser people learn to use hospitality one to another without grudging, *1 Pet. iv. 9.*

Lastly, He concludes with a prayer, *ver. 19. Think upon me my God, for good.* (1.) Nehemiah here mentions what he had done for this people, not in pride, as boasting of himself, nor in passion, as upbraiding them, nor doth it appear that he had occasion to do it in his own vindication, as Paul had to relate his like self-denying tenderness of the Corinthians, but to shame the rulers out of their oppressions; let them learn of him to be neither greedy in their demands, nor paltry in their expenses, and then they would have the credit and comfort of it as he had. (2.) He mentions it to God, in prayer, not as if he thought he had thereby merited any favour from God, as a debt, but to shew that he looked not for any recompence of his generosity from men, but depended upon God not to make up to him what he had lost and laid out for his honour; and here reckoned the favour of God reward enough; if God do but think upon me for good, I have enough. His thoughts to us-ward are our happiness, *Psal. xl. 5.* He refers himself to God to recompence him in such a manner as he pleased; if men forget me, let my God think on me, and I desire no more.

C H A P. VI.

The cities of oppressed poverty being filled, we are now to inquire how the building of the wall goes forward, and in this chapter we find it carried on with vigour, and finished with joy, notwithstanding the restless attempts of the gates of hell to hinder it. How the Jews enemies were baffled in their design to put a stop to it by force, we read before, chap. iv. Here we find how their endeavours to drive Nehemiah off from it were frustrated. (1.) When they courted him to an interview, with design to do him a mischief, he would not stir, *ver. 1—4.* (2.) When they would have made him believe his undertaking was represented as seditious and treasonable, he regarded not the insinuation, *ver. 5—9.* (3.) When they hired pretended prophets to advise him to retire into the temple for his own safety, still he kept his ground, *ver. 10—14.* (4.) Notwithstanding the secret correspondence that was kept up between them and some false and treacherous Jews, the work was finished in a short time, *ver. 15—19.* Such as these were the struggles between the church and its enemies, but great is God's cause, and will be prosperous and victorious.

1. NOW it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates) 2. That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono: but they thought to do me mischief. 3. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? 4. Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered after the same manner. 5. Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me, in like manner, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand: 6. Wherein was written; It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king according to these words. 7. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now, therefore, and let us take counsel together. 8. Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. 9. For they all made us afraid, saying, their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

Two plots upon Nehemiah we have here an account of; how cunningly they were laid by his enemies, and how happily frustrated by God's good providence, and his prudence.

1. A plot to trepan him into a snare. The enemies had an account of the good forwardness the work was in, that all the breaches of the walls were made up, so that they looked upon it as good as done; though at that time the doors of the gates were off the hinges, *ver. 1.* And therefore they must now or never by one bold stroke take off Nehemiah; they heard how well guarded he was, so that there was no attacking him upon the spot, they will therefore try by all the arts of wheedling to get him among them. Observe, (1.) With what hellish subtilty they courted him to meet them, not in any city, lest they should have given umbrage to suspect that they intended to secure him, but in a village in the lot of Benjamin, *come let us meet together* to consult about the common interests of our provinces; or they would have him think that they coveted his friendship, and would be glad to be better acquainted with him, in order to a good understanding between them, and the settling a good correspondence. But they thought to do him a mischief; it is likely he had some secret intelligence given him, that they designed to imprison or murder him; or, he knew them so well, that without breach of charity he concluded they aimed at his life, and therefore when they spoke fair, he believed them not. (2.) See with what heavenly wisdom he declined the motion. His God did instruct him, to give them that prudent answer by messengers of his own, *I am doing a great work, am very busy, and am loth to let the work stand still while I leave it to come down to you, ver. 3.* His care was that the work might not cease, he knew it would if he left it never so little, and why should it cease while I come down to you? He saith nothing of his jealousies, nor reproacheth them for their treacherous design, but gives them a good reason, and one of the true reasons why he would not come. Compliment must always give way to business. Let those

those that are tempted to idle merry meetings by their vain companions, thus answer the temptation, we have work to do, and must not neglect it. Four times they attacked him with the same solicitation, and he as often returned the same answer, which we may suppose was very vexatious to them, for really it was ceasing of the work that they aimed at, and it would make them despair of breaking the undertaking, to see the undertaker so intent upon it. I answered, faith he, after the same manner, *ver. 4.* Note, We must never suffer ourselves to be overcome by the greatest importunity to do any thing ill or imprudent; but when we are attacked with the same temptation, still resist it with the same reason and resolution.

2. A plot to terrify him from his work. Could they but drive him off, the work would cease of course. This therefore Sanballat attempts, but in vain. (1.) He endeavours to possess Nehemiah with an apprehension, that his undertaking to build the walls of Jerusalem was generally represented as factious and seditious, and would be resented accordingly at court, *ver. 5, 6, 7.* The best men, even in their most innocent and excellent performances, have lain under this imputation. This is written to him in an open letter, as a thing generally known and talked of, that it was reported among the nations, and Gashmu will aver it for truth, that Nehemiah was aiming to make himself king, and to shake off the Persian yoke. Note, It is common for that which is the sense only of the malicious to be falsely represented by them, as the sense of the many. Now Sanballat pretends to inform Nehemiah of this as a friend, that he might hasten to court to clear himself, or stay his proceedings, for fear they should be thus misconstrued; at least upon this surmise he urgeth him to give him the meeting, *let us take counsel together*, how to quell the report, hoping by this means either to take him off, or at least to take him off from his business. Thus were his words *softer than oil*, and yet *war was in his heart*, and he hoped, like Judas, to kiss and kill: But surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. Nehemiah was soon aware of what they aimed at, to *weaken their hands from the work*, *ver. 9.* and therefore not only denied that such things were true, but that they were reported; he was better known than to be thus suspected. (2.) Thus he escaped the snare, and kept his ground, nor would he be frightened by winds and clouds from sowing and reaping. Suppose it was thus reported, we must never omit known duty merely for fear it should be misconstrued, but while we keep a good conscience, let us trust God with our good name. But indeed it was not thus reported. God's people, though sufficiently loaded with reproach, yet are not really in so ill a name as some would have them thought to be in.

In the midst of his complaint of their malice, in endeavouring to frighten him, and to weaken his hands, he lifts up his heart to heaven in this short prayer, *now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* It is the great support and relief of good people, that in all their straits and difficulties they have a good God to go to, from whom by faith and prayer they may fetch in grace to silence their fears, and *strengthen their hands*, when their enemies are endeavouring to fill them with fears and weaken their hands. When in our christian work and warfare, we are entering upon any particular service or conflicts, this is a good prayer for us to put up. I have such a duty to do, such a temptation to grapple with, *now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.* Some read it, not as a prayer, but as a holy resolution (for *O God* is supplied in our translation) *now therefore I will strengthen my hands.* Note, Christian fortitude will be sharpened by opposition. Every temptation to draw us from our duty, should quicken us so much the more to our duty.

10. Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple; for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. 11. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. 12. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. 14. My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and on the prophets Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

The Jews leave no stone unturned, no way untried to take Nehemiah off from building the wall about Jerusalem, in order to this they had tried to fetch him into the country to them, but in vain; now they try to drive him into the temple for his own safety; let him be any where but at his work. Observing him to be a cautious man, they will endeavour to gain their point by making him cowardly. Observe.

1. How basely the enemies managed this temptation.

(1.) That which they designed, was to bring Nehemiah to do a foolish thing, that they might laugh at him, and insult over him for doing it, and so lessen his interest and influence, *ver. 13.* that I should be afraid, and so they might have matter for an evil report, and might reproach me. This was indeed doing the devil's work, who is men's tempter, that he may be their accuser, draws men to sin; that he may glory in their shame. The greatest mischief our enemies can do us, is to frighten us from our duty, and bring us to do ill things.

(2.) The tools they made use of were a pretended prophet and prophets, whom they hired to persuade Nehemiah to quit his work, and retire for his own safety. The pretended prophet was Shemaiah, of whom it is said, that he was shut up in his own house, either under pretence of retirement for meditation, and to consult the mind of God; or to give Nehemiah a sign in like manner to make himself a recluse. It should seem Nehemiah had a value for him, for he went to his house to consult with him, *ver. 10.* Other prophets there were, and one prophets, Noadiah, *ver. 14.* that were in the interest of the Jews enemies, pensioners to them, and traitors to their country. Whether they pretended to inspiration doth not appear, they do not say, *thus saith the Lord*, as the false prophets of old did: if not so, yet they would be thought to excel in divine knowledge, and human fore-sight, and were therefore consulted in difficult cases, as prophets had been. These the enemies feed to be of counsel for them. Let us hence take occasion to lament, (1.) The wickedness of such bad men as these prophets. That ever any should be so perfidious as to betray the cause of God and

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their country, even under the pretence of communion with God, and concern for their country. (2.) The unhappiness of such good men as Nehemiah, who are in danger of being imposed upon by such cheats, and to whom no temptation comes with more force than that which comes under a colour of religion, of revelation and devotion, and is brought by the hand of prophets.

(3.) The pretence was plausible. These prophets suggested to Nehemiah, that the enemies would come and slay him, in the night they would slay him, which he had reason enough to believe was true; they would if they could, if they durst. They pretended to be much concerned for his safety; they were all undone, if any harm should come to him; and therefore they very gravely advised him to hide himself in the temple till the danger was over: that was a strong and sacred place, where he would be under the special protection of heaven, *Psal. xxvii. 5.* If Nehemiah had been prevailed with to do this, immediately the people would both have left off their work, and thrown down their arms, and every one would have shifted for their own safety; and then the enemies might easily, and without opposition, have demolished the works, broken down the wall again, and so gained their point. Though self-preservation is a fundamental principle of the law of nature, yet that is not always the best and wisest counsel which pretends to go upon that principle.

2. See how bravely Nehemiah vanquished this temptation, and came off a conqueror.

(1.) He immediately resolved not to yield to it, *ver. 11.* See here, (1.) What his reasonings are, *should such a man as I flee?* Shall I desert God's work, or discourage my own workmen, whom I have employed and encouraged? Shall I be over-credulous of reports, and over-solicitous about my own life. I that am the governor, on whom so many eyes are, both of friends and foes; another might flee, but not I. *Who is there that being as I am*, in my post of honour, and power, and trust, would go into the temple, and sneak there when business is to be done, yea, though it were to save his life. Note, When we are tempted to sin, we should remember who, and what we are, that we may not do any thing unbecoming us, and the profession we make. *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, P. o. x. xi. 4.* (2.) What was the result of his reasonings, he is at a point, I will not go in, I will rather die at my work, than live in an inglorious retreat from it. Note, Holy courage and magnanimity, will engage us whatever it cost us, never to decline a good work, nor never to do an ill thing.

(2.) He presently was aware what was the rise of it, *ver. 12.* I perceived that God had not sent him, that he gave this advice, not by the divine direction, ordinary or extraordinary, but with a design against me. The wickedness of such mercenary wretches will sooner or later be brought to light. Two things Nehemiah saith he dreaded in that which he was advised to. (1.) Offending God: *that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin.* Note, Sin is that which above any thing we should dread: and a good preservative it is against sin, to be afraid of nothing but sin. (2.) Shaming himself, *that they might reproach me.* Note, Next to the sinfulness of sin, we should dread the scandalousness of it.

(3.) He humbly begs of God to reckon with them for their base designs upon him, *ver. 14.* My God, think thou upon Tobiah, and the rest of them, according to their works. As when he had mentioned his own good services, he did not covetously or ambitiously prescribe to God what reward he should give him, but modestly prayed, *think upon me, my God*, chap. v. 19. So here he doth not revengefully imprecate any particular judgment upon his enemies, but refers the matter to God; thou knowest their hearts, and art the avenger of falsehood and wrong, take cognisance of this cause, judge between me and them, and take what way and time thou pleasest to call them to an account for it. Note, Whatever injuries are done us, we must not avenge ourselves, but commit our cause to him that judgeth righteously.

15. ¶ So the wall was finished, in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. 16. And it came to pass that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God. 17. ¶ Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. 18. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam, the son of Berechiah. 19. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him: and Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Nehemiah is here finishing the wall of Jerusalem, and yet still has trouble created him by his enemies.

1. Tobiah, and other the adversaries of the Jews, had the mortification to see the wall built up, notwithstanding all their attempts to hinder it. The wall was begun and finished in fifty-two days, and yet we have reason to believe they rested on the sabbaths, *ver. 15.* Many were employed, and there was room for them; what they did they did cheerfully, and minded their business because they loved it. The threats of their enemies, which were intended to weaken them, it is likely, quickened them to go on with their work the more vigorously, that they might get it done before the enemy came. Thus, *out of the eater came forth meat.* See what a great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we would set about it in earnest, and keep close to it.

When the enemies heard that the wall was finished before they thought it was well begun, and when they doubted not but to have put a stop to it, they were much cast down in their own eyes, *ver. 16.* (1.) They were ashamed of their own confidence, that they should cause the work to cease, they were crest-fallen upon the disappointment. (2.) They envied the prosperity and success of the Jews, grieved to see the walls of Jerusalem built, while, it may be, the kings of Persia had not permitted them thus to fortify the cities of Samaria. When Cain envied his brother, his countenance fell, *Gen. iv. 5.* (3.) They despaired of ever doing them the mischief they designed them, of bringing them down, and making a prey of them; and well they might, for they perceived by the wonderful success, that the work was wrought of God. Even these heathens had so much sense, as (1.) To see a special providence of God condescending about the affairs of the church, when they did remarkably prosper. They said among the heathen, *the Lord has done great things for them*, it is his doing, *Psal. cxxvi. 2.* God fighteth for Israel, and worketh with them. (2.) To believe that God's work will be perfect, when they perceived that the work was of God, they expected no other but

that it would go on and prosper. (3.) To conclude, that if it were of God it was to no purpose to think of opposing it, it would certainly prevail and be victorious.

2. Nehemiah had the vexation notwithstanding this, to see some of his own people treacherously corresponding with Tobiah, and serving his interest, and a great grief and discouragement no doubt it was to him, (1.) Even of the nobles of Judah, there were those who had so little sense of honour and their country's good, as to communicate counsels with Tobiah by letter, *ver. 17.* They wrote with all the freedom and familiarity of friends to him, and welcomed his letters to them. Could nobles do a thing so mean? nobles of Judah so wicked a thing? It seems, great men are not always wise, nor always honest. (2.) Many in Judah were in a strict but secret confederacy with him, to advance the interest of his country, though it would certainly be the ruin of their own. They were sworn unto him, not as their prince, but as their friend and ally, because both he and his son had married daughters of Israel, *ver. 18.* See the mischief of marrying with strangers, for one heathen that was converted by it, ten Jews were perverted. When once they became akin to Tobiah, they soon became sworn to him. A sinful love leads to a sinful league. (3.) They had the impudence to court Nehemiah himself into a friendship with him; they reported his good deeds before me; represented him as an ingenious gentleman, and well worthy my acquaintance, as an honest gentleman, and one that I might confide in. We are bid indeed to *speake ill of no man*, but never to speak well of ill men; they that forsake the law praised the wicked, *Prov. xxviii. 4.* (4.) They were so false as to betray Nehemiah's counsels to him; they uttered Nehemiah's words to him, perverting them no doubt, and putting false constructions upon them, which furnished Tobiah with matter for letters to put him in fear, and so drive him from his work, and discourage him in it. Thus were all their thoughts against him for evil, yet God thought upon him for good.

C H A P. VII.

The success of one good design for God and our generation, should encourage us to proceed and form some other; Nehemiah did so, having fortified Jerusalem with gates and walls; his next care is, (1.) To see the city well kept, ver. 1—4. (2.) To see it well peopled, in order whereunto, he here reviews and calls over the register of the children of the captivity, the families that returned at first, and records it, ver. 5—73. It is the same in effect with that which we had, Ezra ii. What use he made of it we shall find afterwards, when he brought one of the ten to live in Jerusalem, chap. xi. 1.

1. **N**OW it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters, and the fingers, and the Levites were appointed. 2. That I gave my brother, Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: (for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.) 3. And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened, until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house. 4. Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.

God faith concerning his church, *Isa. liii. 6.* I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem: that is Nehemiah's care here; for dead walls without living watchmen are but a poor defence to a city.

1. He appointed the porters, fingers, and Levites, in their places to their work; it is meant of their work in general, which was to attend the temple-service, that had been neglected in some degree, but was now revived. God's worship is the defence of a place, and his ministers, when they mind their duty, are watchmen on the walls; or, in particular, he ordered them to be ready against the wall was to be dedicated, that they might perform that service in an orderly and solemn manner; and the dedication of it was its strength. That is likely to be beneficial to us which is devoted to God.

1. He appointed two governors or consuls, to whom he committed the care of the city, and gave them in charge to provide for the public peace and safety. Hanani, his brother, who came to him with the tidings of the desolations of Jerusalem was one, a man of approved integrity and affection to his country; the other was Hananiah, that had been ruler of the palace, for he that has approved himself faithful in less, shall be intrusted with more. Of this Hananiah it is said, that he was a faithful man, and one that feared God above many, *ver. 2.* Note, 1. Among those who fear God truly, there are some who fear him greatly, and excel others in the expressions and instances of that fear: and they are worthy a double portion of that honour which is due to them that fear the Lord, *Psal. xv. 4.* There were many in Jerusalem that feared God, but this good man was more eminent for religion and serious godliness than any. 2. Those that fear God must evidence it by their being faithful to all men; and universally conscientious. 3. God's Jerusalem is then likely to flourish when those rule in it, and have charge of it, who excel in virtue and are eminent both for godliness and honesty. It is supposed by some, Nehemiah was now about to return to the Persian court to have his commission renewed, and left these two worthy men in charge with the affairs of the city in his absence. Good governors when and where they cannot act themselves, must be very careful whom they depute.

3. He gave orders about the shutting of the gates, and the guarding of the walls, *ver. 3, 4.* See here, (1.) What the present state of Jerusalem was. The city in compass was large and great, the walls inclosed the same ground as formerly, but much of it lay waste, for the houses were not built, but few in comparison with what had been; so that Nehemiah walled the city in faith, and with an eye to that promise of the replenishing of it, which God had lately made by the prophet, *Zech. viii. 3, &c.* Though the people were not so, he believed they would be multiplied, and therefore built the walls so as to make room for them; had he not depended upon this, he might have thought walls without a city as great a reproach as a city without walls. (2.) What was the care of Nehemiah for it; he ordered the rulers of the cities themselves, (1.) To stand by and see the city gates shut up and barred every night; for in vain had they a wall, if they were careless of their gates. (2.) To take care that they should not be opened in the morning, till they could not see the coasts clear. (3.) To set centinels upon the walls, or elsewhere, at convenient distances, who

should, in case of the approach of the enemy, give timely notice to the city of the danger; and as it came to their turn to watch, they must post themselves over against their own houses, because of them, it might be presumed, they would be in a particular manner careful. The public safety depends upon every one's particular care to guard himself and his own family against sin that common enemy. It is every one's interest to watch, but many understand not their own interest, it is therefore incumbent upon magistrates to appoint watches. And as this people had lately found God with them in their building, else they had built in vain, so now the wall was built, no doubt they were made sensible, that except the Lord kept the city, the watchmen waked but in vain, *Psal. cxxvii. 1, 2.*

5. ¶ And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy: and I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein. 6. These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem, and to Judah, every one unto his city; 7. Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah; the number, I say, of the men of the people, of Israel, was this; 8. The children of Paroth, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 9. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 10. The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two. 11. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred and eighteen. 12. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 13. The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five. 14. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 15. The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight. 16. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight. 17. The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two. 18. The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven. 19. The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven. 20. The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five. 21. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 22. The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight. 23. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four. 24. The children of Hariph, an hundred and twelve. 25. The children of Gibeon, ninety and five. 26. The men of Beth-lehem and Netophah, an hundred fourscore and eight. 27. The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 28. The men of Beth-azmaveth, forty and two. 29. The men of Kirjath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three. 30. The men of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 31. The men of Michmas, an hundred and twenty and two. 32. The men of Beth-el and Ai, an hundred twenty and three. 33. The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two. 34. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 35. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 36. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 37. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one. 38. The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty. 39. ¶ The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 40. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 41. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 42. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. 43. ¶ The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, and of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four. 44. ¶ The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred forty and eight. 45. ¶ The porters: the children of Shalum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, an hundred thirty and eight. 46. ¶ The Nethinims: the children of Ziba, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 47. The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon, 48. The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmai, 49. The children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, 50. The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, 51. The children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phasai, 52. The children of Bebai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephiselim, 53. The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 54. The children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 55. The children

dren of Barkos, the children of Sifera, the children of Tamah, 56. The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha. 57. ¶ The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida, 58. The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 59. The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Amon. 60. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two. 61. And these were they which went up also from Tel-melah, Tel-haretha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel. 62. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two. 63. ¶ And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife and was called after their name. 64. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 65. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummin. 66. ¶ The whole congregation together, was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore. 67. Beside their man-servants, and their maid-servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing men, and singing-women. 68. Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five: 69. Their camels, four hundred thirty and five: six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses. 70. ¶ And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work: the Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basons, five hundred and thirty priests garments. 71. And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work, twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pound of silver. 72. And that which the rest of the people gave, was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pound of silver, and threescore and seven priests garments. 73. So the priests and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities, and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

We have here another good project of Nehemiah's, for wise and zealous men will be always contriving something or other for the glory of God, and the edification of his church. He knew very well, that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the number and valour of the inhabitants, than upon the height or strength of its walls; and therefore observing that the people were few that dwelt in it, he thought fit to take an account of the people, that he might find what families had formerly had their settlements in Jerusalem, but were now removed into the country, that he might bring them back, and what families could any other way be influenced by their religion, or by their business, to come and rebuild the houses in Jerusalem, and dwell in them. So little reason have we to wish that we may be placed alone in the earth, or in Jerusalem itself, that much of our safety and comfort depends upon our neighbours and friends; the more the stronger, the more the merrier. It is the wisdom of the governors of a nation, to keep the balance even between city and country; that the metropolis be not so extravagantly large as to drain and impoverish the country, nor yet so weak as not to be able to protect it. Now observe,

1. Whence this good design of Nehemiah's came: he owns, *ver. 5. my God put it into their heart.* Note, Whatever good motion is in our minds, either prudent or pious, we must acknowledge it to come from God. It was he that put it into our hearts; for every good gift and every good work is from above; he gives knowledge, he gives grace; all is of him, and therefore all must be to him. What is done by human prudence, must be ascribed to the direction of divine providence; he that teaches the husbandman his discretion, *Ish. xxviii. 26.* teaches the statesman his.

2. What method he took in prosecution of it.

1. He called the rulers together, and the people, that he might have an account of the present state of their families, their number and strength, and where they were settled; which, it is likely, when he summoned them to come together, he ordered them to bring along with them out of their several districts. And I doubt they were not so many but it might be soon done.

2. He reviewed the old register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and compared the present accounts with that; and here we have the repetition of that out of *Ezra ii.* The title is the same here, *ver. 6, 7.* as there, *ver. 1, 2.* These are the children of the province, &c. Two things are here repeated and recorded a second time from thence, (1.) The names and numbers of their several families; and, (2.) Their obligations to the service of the temple. The repetition of these accounts, may intimate to us the delight which the great God is pleased to take in the persons, families, and services of his spiritual Israel, and the particular notice he takes of them. He knows them that are his, knows them all, knows them by name, has his eye on the register of those children of the captivity, and doth all according to the ancient counsel of his will concerning them.

1. Here is an account of the heads of the several families that first came up, *ver. 6—69.* As to this, (1.) Though it seem of little use to us now, yet then it was of great use to compare what they had been with what they now were. We may suppose they were much increased by this time, but it would do well for them to remember their small beginnings, that they might

acknowledge God in multiplying their families, and building them up. By this means likewise their genealogies would be preserved, and the distinction of their families kept up, till the Messiah should come, and then an end be put to all their genealogies, which were preserved for his sake, but afterwards were useless. But, (2.) There are many differences in the numbers between this catalogue and that in *Ezra*. Most of them indeed are exactly the same, and some others within a very few under or over (one or two perhaps) and therefore I cannot think as some do, that that was the number of these families at the first coming, this as they were now, which was at least forty years after (some make it much more) for we cannot suppose so many families to be not at all, or but little, altered in their numbers in all that time, therefore what differences there are, we may suppose to arise either from the mistakes of transcribers, which easily happen in numbers, or from the diversity of the copies from which they were taken, or perhaps one was the account of them when they set out from Babylon with Zerubbabel, the other when they came to Jerusalem. The sum totals are all just the same there and here, except of the singing-men and singing-women, which there are two hundred, here two hundred forty five. Those were not of such account, as that they should keep any strict account of them.

2. Here is an account of the offerings which were given towards the work of God, *ver. 70, &c.* This differs much from that, *Ezra ii. 68, 69.* and it may be questioned whether it refer to the same contribution; here the Tirshatha, or chief governor, begins the offering, who there was not mentioned. And the single sum mentioned there, exceeds all those here put together; yet it is probable it was the same, but that followed one copy of the subscriptions, this another; for the last verse is the same here that it was *Ezra ii. 70.* adding, *chap. iii. 1.* Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built upon the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel. Whatever is given to the work of God, he is not unrighteous to forget it; nor shall even a cup of cold water wherewith he is honoured go without its reward.

C H A P. VIII.

*Ezra came up out of Babylon thirteen years before Nehemiah came, yet we have here a piece of good work which he did, that might have been done before but was not, till Nehemiah came, who though he was not such a scholar, nor such a divine, as Ezra, nor such a teacher in the law of his God, yet was a man of a more lively active spirit. His zeal set Ezra's learning on work, and then great things were done; as we find here, where we have, (1.) The public and solemn reading and expounding of the law, *ver. 1—8.* (2.) The joy which the people were ordered to express upon that occasion, *ver. 9—12.* (3.) The solemn keeping of the feast of tabernacles according to the law, *ver. 13—18.**

1. **A**ND all the people gathered themselves together as one man, into the street that was before the water-gate, and they spake unto Ezra the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. 2. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3. And he read therein before the street that was before the water-gate, from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. 4. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithiah and Shema, and Ananiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hattum, and Halhabadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, (for he was above all the people) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: 6. And Ezra blessed the LORD the great God: and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7. Also Jehua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Peraiah, and the Levites caused the people to understand the law, and the people stood in their place. 8. So they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

We have here an account of a solemn religious assembly, and the good work that was done in that assembly, to the honour of God, and the edification of the church.

1. The time of it was the first day of the seventh month, *ver. 2.* That was the day of the feast of trumpets, which is called a sabbath, and on which they were to have a holy convocation, *Lev. xxiii. 24. Numb. xxix. 1.* But that was not all, it was on that day that the altar was set up, and they began to offer their burnt-offerings after their return out of captivity, a late mercy in the memory of many now living, and in a thankful remembrance of that, it is likely, they had kept this feast ever since, with more than ordinary solemnity. Divine favours that are fresh in mind, and which we ourselves have been witnesses of, should be and usually are most affecting.

2. The place was in the street that was before the water-gate, *ver. 1.* a spacious broad street, able to contain so great a multitude, which the court of the temple was not, for probably it was not now built near so large as it had been in Solomon's time. Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple, but praying, and praising, and preaching, were and are services of religion as acceptably performed in one place as in another. When this congregation was thus met in the street of the city, no doubt God was with them.

3. The persons that met were all the people, who were not compelled to come, but voluntarily gathered themselves together by common agreement,

as one man: not only men came, but women and children, even as many as were capable of understanding what they heard. Masters of families should bring their families with them to the public worship of God. Women and children have souls to save, and are therefore concerned to acquaint themselves with the word of God, and attend on the means of knowledge and grace. Little ones, as they come to the exercise of reason, must be trained up in the exercise of religion.

4. The matter of this assembly was Ezra the priest, he presided in this service. None so fit as he to expound and preach, who was such a ready scribe in the law of his God. (1.) His call to the service was very clear, for being in office as a priest, and qualified as a scribe, the people spake to him to bring the book of the law, and read it to them, *ver. 1.* God gave him ability and authority, and then the people gave him opportunity and invitation. Knowledge is spiritual alms, which they that are able should give to every one that need, to every one that asketh. (2.) His post was very convenient, he stood in a pulpit or tower of wood, which they had made for the word; so it is in the original, for the preaching of the word, that what he said might be the more gracefully delivered, and the better heard, and that the eyes of the hearers might be upon him, which would engage their attention; as *Luke iv. 20.* (3.) He had several assistants, some that stood with him, *ver. 4.* six on his right hand, and seven on his left; either his pulpit was so contrived as to hold them all in a row, as in a gallery (but then it would scarce have been called a tower) or they had desks a degree lower. Some think he appointed them to read when he was weary, at least his taking them as assessors with him, put an honour upon them before the people, in order to their being employed in the same service another time. Others who are mentioned, *ver. 7.* seem to have been employed at the same time in other places near at hand, to read and expound to those who could not come within hearing of Ezra. Of those also there were thirteen priests, whose lips were to keep knowledge, *Mal. ii. 7.* It is a great mercy to a people thus to be furnished with ministers that are apt to teach; happy was Ezra in having such assistants as these, and happy those in having such a guide as Ezra.

5. The religious exercises performed in this assembly were not ceremonial but moral, praying and preaching; Ezra, as president of the assembly, was, (1.) *The people's mouth to God*, and they affectionately joined with him, *ver. 6.* He blessed the Lord as the great God, gave honour to him by praising his perfections, and praying for his favour; and the people, in token of their concurrence with him, both in prayers and praises, said *amen, amen, lifted up their hands* in token of their desire being towards God, and all their expectation from him; and bowed their heads in token of their reverence of him and subjection to him. Thus must we adore God, and address ourselves to him, when we are going to read and hear the word of God, as those that see God in his word, very great and very good. (2.) *God's mouth to the people*, and they attentively hearkened to him. This was the chief business of the solemnity, and observe,

1. Ezra brought the law before the congregation, *ver. 2.* He had taken care to provide himself with the best and most correct copies of the law, and what he had laid up for his own use and satisfaction he here brought forth, as a good householder out of his treasury for the benefit of the church. Observe, 1. The book of the law is not to be confined to the Scribes studies, but to be brought before the congregation, and read to them in their own language. 2. Ministers when they go to the pulpit should take their Bibles with them; Ezra did so; thence they must fetch their knowledge, and according to that rule they must speak, and must shew that they do so. See *2 Chron. xvii. 9.*

2. He opened the book with great reverence and solemnity, *in the sight of all the people, ver. 5.* He brought it forth with a sense of the great mercy of God to them in giving them leave to read it, that it was not a spring shut up and a fountain sealed. The taking of the book, and the opening of the seals, we find celebrated with joy and praise, *Rev. v. 9.* Let us learn to address ourselves to the services of religion with solemn stops and pauses, and not to go about them rashly; let us consider what we are doing, when we take God's book into our hands, and open it; and so also when we bow our knees in prayer, and what we do, let us do it deliberately, *Ecc. v. 1.*

3. He and others read in the book of the law, *from morning till night, ver. 3.* and they read distinctly, *ver. 8.* Reading the scriptures in religious assemblies, is an ordinance of God, whereby he is honoured, and his church edified. And upon special occasions, we must be willing to attend for many hours together, on the reading and expounding of the word of God: they here were thus employed six hours. Let those that read and preach the word, learn also to deliver themselves distinctly; as those who understand what they say and are affected with it themselves, and who desire that those they speak to may understand it, retain it, and be affected with it likewise. *It is a snare for a man to devour that which is holy.*

4. What they read they expounded, shewed the intent and meaning of it, and what use was to be made of it they gave the sense in other words, that they might cause the people to understand the reading, *ver. 7, 8.* Note, 1. It is requisite that those who hear the word should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words, *Matt. xxiv. 15.* 2. It is therefore required of those who are teachers by office, that they explain the word and give the sense of it. *Understandest thou what thou readest? and have ye understood all these things?* are good questions to be put to the hearers; but *how should we, except some one guide us?* is as proper a question for them to put to their teachers, *Acts viii. 30, 31.* Reading is good, and preaching good, but expounding brings the reading and the preaching together, which makes the reading the more intelligible, and the preaching the more convincing.

5. The people carried themselves very decently and well, when the word was read and opened to them.

1. With great reverence. When Ezra opened the book, *all the people stood up, ver. 5.* thereby shewing respect both to Ezra and to the word he was about to read. It becomes servants to stand when their masters speak to them; in honour to their master, and to shew a readiness to do as they are bidden.

2. With great fixedness and composedness they stood in their place, *ver. 7.* several ministers were reading and expounding at some distance from each other, and each of the people kept their post, did not go to hear first one and then another, to make remarks upon them, but stood in their place, that they might neither give disturbance to others, nor receive any distraction themselves.

3. With great attention and a close application of mind; *the ears of all the people were unto the book of the law, ver. 3.* were even chained to it, they heard readily, and minded every word. The word of God commands attention and deserves it. If through carelessness we let much slip in hearing, there is danger that through forgetfulness we shall let all slip after hearing.

9. ¶ And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy

unto the LORD your God, mourn not nor weep: for all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. 10. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. 11. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy, neither be ye grieved. 12. And all the people went their way to eat and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

We may observe here,

1. How the people were wounded with the words of the law that were read to them. The law worketh death and speaks terror, shews men their sin, and their misery and danger because of sin, and thunder a curse against every one that continues not in every part of his duty. Therefore when they heard it, they all wept, *ver. 9.* it was a good sign their hearts were tender, like Josiah's, when he heard the words of the law. They wept to think how they had offended God, and exposed themselves by their many violations of the law; when some wept, all wept, for they all saw themselves guilty before God.

2. How they were healed and comforted with the words of peace that were spoken to them. It was well that they were so much affected with the word of God, and received the impressions of it; but they must not exceed in their mourning; especially not at this time, because the day was holy to the Lord, it was one of the solemn feasts, on which it was their duty to rejoice. And even sorrow for sin must not hinder our joy in God, but rather lead to it, and prepare us for it.

(1.) The masters of the assembly endeavour to pacify them, and encourage them. Now Nehemiah is brought in, and not before, in this chapter, he took notice of the people's weeping; Ezra was pleased to see them so affected with the word, but Nehemiah observed to him, and Ezra concurred in the thought, that it was now unreasonable: this day was holy, it is called a sabbath, *Lev. xxiii. 24.* and therefore was to be celebrated with joy and praise, not as if it were a day to afflict the souls. (1.) They forbid the people to mourn and weep, *ver. 9.* be not sorry, *ver. 10.* Hold your peace, neither be ye grieved, *ver. 11.* Every thing is beautiful in its season; as we must not be merry, when God calls to mourning, so we must not frighten and afflict ourselves when God has given us occasion to rejoice. Even sorrow for sin must not grow so excessive, as to hinder our joy in God, and our cheerfulness in his service. (2.) They commanded them to testify their joy, to put on the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness. They allow them in token of their joy to feast themselves, to eat and drink better than on other days, *eat the fat, and drink the sweet; but then it must be* (1.) With charity to the poor, *send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared,* that your abundance may supply their want; that they may rejoice with you and their loins may bless you. Christ directs those that make feasts, to invite their poor neighbours, *Luke xiv. 12.* But it is especially the duty of a religious feast, as well as of a religious fast, to draw out the soul to the hungry, *Isa. lviii. 7-10.* God's bounty should make us bountiful. Many will eat the fat, and drink the sweet themselves, even to excess, that will never allow portions, nor scarce crumbs to the poor, who may read their own doom in the parable of the rich man, *Luke xvi. 19, &c.* But such knew not, or consider not, what God gave them their estates for. Observe, We must not only give to those that offer themselves, but send to those that are out of sight. *The liberal deviseth liberal things,* and seeks objects of charity. (2.) It must be with piety and devotion: the joy of the Lord is your strength. Let it not be a carnal sensual joy, but holy and spiritual, the joy of the Lord, joy in the goodness of God, under the conduct and government of the grace of God; joy arising from our interest in the love and favour of God, and the tokens of his favour. This joy will be your strength, therefore encourage it; it will be your strength, (1.) For the performance of the other duties of the feast; the more cheerful we are in our religious exercises, the more we shall abound in them. (2.) For all that which you have to do in conformity to the law of God which has been read to you. Holy joy will be oil to the wheels of our obedience. (3.) For the resisting of your enemies that are plotting against you. The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies, and put our mouths out of taste to those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks.

(2.) The assembly complied with the directions that were given them. Their weeping was stilled, *ver. 11.* and they made great mirth, *ver. 12.* Note, We ought always to have such a command of every passion, as that however it may break out, it may soon be restrained and called in again, when we are convinced that it is either unreasonable or unseasonable. *He that has such a rule as this over his own spirit is better than the mighty.* Observe, (1.) After they had wept they rejoiced; holy mourning makes way for holy mirth. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. They that tremble at the convictions of the word, may triumph in the consolations of it. (2.) The ground of their joy was very good; they made mirth, not because they had the fat to eat, and the sweet to drink, and a deal of good company, but because they had understood the words that were declared to them. Note, 1. To have the holy scriptures with us, and helps to understand them; is a very great mercy, which we have abundant reason to rejoice in. Bibles and ministers are the joy of God's Israel. 2. The better we understand the word of God, the more comfort we shall find in it: for the darkness of trouble ariseth from the darkness of ignorance and mistake. When the words were first declared to them, they wept, but when they understood them, they rejoiced, finding at length precious promises made to those who repented and reformed, and that therefore there was hope in Israel.

13. ¶ And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. 14. And they found written in the law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths, in the feast of the seventh month: 15. And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive-branches, and pine-branches, and myrtle-branches, and palm-branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. 16. ¶ So the people went

went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. 17. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity, made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun, unto that day had not the children of Israel done so: and there was very great gladness. 18. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God: and they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

We have here,

1. The peoples renewed attendance upon the word. They had spent the greatest part of one day in praying and hearing, and yet were so far from being weary of that new moon and sabbath, that the next day after, though it was no festival, the chief of them came together again to hear Ezra expound, ver. 13. which they found more delightful and gainful, than any worldly pleasure or profit whatsoever. Note, The more we converse with the word of God, if we rightly understand it, and be affected with it, the more we shall covet to converse with it; and to increase in our acquaintance with it, saying, *how sweet are thy words unto my mouth!* They that understand the scriptures well, will still be desirous to understand them better. Now the priests and the Levites themselves came with the chief of the people to Ezra, that prince of expositors, to understand the words of the law, or as it is in the margin, *that they might instruct in the words of the law*, they came to be taught themselves, that they might be qualified to teach others. Observe, 1. That though on the first day, Ezra's humility had set them on his right hand, and on his left, as teachers with him, ver. 4. 7. yet now they being by trial made more sensible than ever of their own deficiencies, and his excellencies, on the second day their humility set them at Ezra's feet, as learners of him. 2. Those that would teach others, must themselves receive instruction. Priests and Levites must be taught first, and then teach.

2. The peoples ready obedience to the word, in one particular instance, as soon as they were made sensible of their duty therein. It is likely, Ezra, *after the wisdom of his God that was in his hand* (Ezra vii. 25.) when they applied themselves to him for instruction out of the law on the second day of the seventh month, read to them those laws which concerned the feast of that month, and among the rest that of the feast of tabernacles, Lev. xxiii. 34. Deut. xvi. 13. Ministers should preach not only that which is true and good, but that which is seasonable, directing to the work of the day in its day.

Here is, 1. The divine appointment of the feast of tabernacles reviewed, ver. 14, 15. They found written in the law a commandment concerning it. They that diligently search the scriptures will find those things written there, which they had forgotten, or not duly considered. This feast of tabernacles, was a memorial of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness, a representation of our tabernacle-state in this world, and a type of the holy joy of the gospel church; the conversation of the nations to the faith of Christ is foretold under the figure of this feast, Zech. xiv. 16. they shall come to keep the feast of tabernacles, as having here no continuing city. This feast was to be proclaimed in all their cities. The people were themselves to fetch boughs of trees, (they of Jerusalem fetched them from the mount of Olives) and to make booths or arbors of them, in which they were to lodge (as much as the weather would permit) and to make merry during the feast.

2. This appointment religiously observed, ver. 16, 17. Then we read and hear the word acceptably and profitably, when we do according to what is written therein: when that appears to be our duty, after it has been neglected is revived.

1. They observed the ceremony: they sat in booths, which the priests and Levites set up in the courts of the temple, those that had houses of their own, on the roofs of them, or in their courts; and those that had not such conveniences set them up in the streets. This feast had usually been observed, 2 Chron. v. 3. Ezra iii. 4, but never with such solemnity as now since Joshua's time, when they were newly settled, as they were now newly re-settled in Canaan. That man loves his house too well, that cannot find in his heart to quit it awhile in compliance either with an ordinance or with a providence of God.

3. They minded the substance; else the ceremony how significant soever had been insignificant. (1.) They did it with gladness; with very great gladness, rejoicing in God, and his goodness to them. All their holy feasts, but this especially, were to be celebrated with joy, which would be much for the honour of God, and their own encouragement in his service. (2.) They attended the reading and expounding of the word of God, during all the days of the feast, ver. 18. They improved their leisure for this good work: spare hours cannot be better spent than in studying the scriptures and conversing with them. At this feast of Tabernacles, God appointed the law to be read, once in seven years; whether this was that year of release in which that service was to be performed, (Deut. xxxi. 10, 11.) doth not appear, however they spent all the days of the feast in that good work, and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly as God had appointed, in which they finished the solemnity the twenty-second day of the month, yet did not scatter, for the twenty-fourth day was appointed to be spent in fasting and prayer. Holy joy must not indispose us for godly sorrow, no more than godly sorrow for holy joy.

C H A P. IX.

The tenth day of the seventh month between the feast of Trumpets, chap. viii. 2. and the feast of Tabernacles, ver. 14. was appointed to be the day of atonement; we have no reason to think but that it was religiously observed, though it is not mentioned: But here we have an account of an occasional fast that was kept a fortnight after that, with reference to the present posture of their affairs, and it was as that, a day of humiliation. There is a time to weep as well as a time to laugh. We have here an account (1.) How this fast was observed, ver. 1-3. (2.) What were the heads of the prayer that was made to God on that occasion, wherein they made a thankful acknowledgment of God's mercies, a penitent confession of sin, and a humble submission to the righteous hand of God in the judgments that were brought upon them; concluding with a solemn resolution of new obedience, ver. 4-38.

LXVIII.*

NOW in the twenty and fourth day of this month, the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. 2. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. 3. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God, one fourth part of the day, and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

We have here a general account of a public fast which the children of Israel kept, probably by order from Nehemiah, by and with the advice and consent of the chief of the fathers. It was a fast that men appointed, but such a fast as God had chosen; for

1. It was a day to afflict the soul, Isa. lviii. 5. It is likely they assembled in the courts of the temple, and they there appeared in sackcloth, and in the posture of mourners with earth on their heads, ver. 1. By those outward expressions of sorrow and humiliation they gave glory to God, took shame to themselves, and stirred up one another to repentance. They were restrained from weeping, chap. viii. 9. but now they were directed to weep. The joy of our holy feasts must give way to the sorrow of our solemn fasts when they come. Every thing is beautiful in its season.

2. It was a day to loose the bands of wickedness, and that is the fast that God has chosen, Isa. lviii. 6. Without this, spreading sackcloth and ashes under us, is but a jest. The seed of Israel, because they were a holy seed appropriated to God, and more excellent than their neighbours, separated themselves from all strangers, with whom they had mingled themselves and joined in affinity, ver. 2. Ezra had separated them from their strange wives some years before, but they had relapsed into the same sin, and had either made marriages, or at least made friendships with them, and contracted such an intimacy as was a snare to them. But now they separated themselves from the strange children, as well as from the strange wives. They that intend by prayers and covenants to join themselves to God, must separate themselves from sin and sinners, for what communion hath light with darkness?

3. It was a day of communion with God; They fasted to him, even to him, Zech. vii. 5. for (1.) They spoke to him in prayer, offered their pious and devout affections to him, in the confession of sin, and the adoration of him as the Lord and their God. Fasting without prayer, is a body without a soul, a worthless carcass. (2.) They heard him speaking to them by his word, for they read in the book of the law, which is very proper on fasting days, that, in the plots of the law we may see our deformities and defilements, and know what to acknowledge, and what to amend. The word will direct and quicken prayer, for by it the Spirit helps our praying infirmities. Observe how the time was equally divided between these two. Three hours, (for that is the fourth part of a day) they spent in reading, expounding, and applying the scriptures; and three hours in confessing sin and praying; so that they staid together six hours, and spent all the time in solemn acts of religion, without saying, behold what a weariness is it! The varying of the exercises made it the less tedious, and as the word they read would furnish the matter for prayer, so prayer would make the word the more profitable. Bishop Patrick thinks they spent the whole twelve hours of the day in devotion, that from six o'clock in the morning till nine they read, and then from nine to twelve they prayed; from twelve to three they read again, and from three till six at night they prayed again. The work of a fast day is good work, and therefore we should endeavour to make a day's work, a good day's work of it.

4. ¶ Then stood up upon the stairs of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God. 5. Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethathiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6. Thou, even thou, art LORD alone, thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all, and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. 7. Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, who broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham. 8. And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him, to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgassites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words, for thou art righteous: 9. And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red Sea: 10. And shewdest signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them: so didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. 11. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. 12. Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. 13. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes, and commandments. 14. And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws,

laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: 15. And gavest them bread from heaven, for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land, which thou hadst sworn to give them. 16. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments. 17. And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them: but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou *art* a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. 18. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This *is* thy god that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations: 19. Yet thou in thy manifold mercies, forsookest them not in the wilderness; the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. 20. Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them and withheidest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. 21. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, *so that* they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. 22. Moreover, thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. 23. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, that broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess *it*. 24. So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. 25. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit-trees in abundance, so that they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness. 26. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them, to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. 27. Therefore thou deliverest them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven: and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. 28. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore ledest them thou in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them; yet when they returned and cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven, and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies: 29. And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments (which if a man do, he shall live in them) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. 30. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. 31. Nevertheless for thy great mercies sake, thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou *art* a gracious and merciful God. 32. Now therefore our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy; let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria, unto this day. 33. Howbeit, thou *art* just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: 34. Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments, and thy testimonies wherewith thou didst testify against them. 35. For they have not served thee in their kingdoms, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked

works. 36. Behold, we *are* servants this day, and *for* the land that thou gavest unto our fathers, to eat the fruit thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we *are* servants in it. 37. And it yielded much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we *are* in great distress. 38. And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and write *it*; and our princes, Levites, and priests seal *unto it*.

We have here an account how the work of this fast day was carried on.

1. The names of the ministers that were employed. They are twice named, *ver.* 4, 5. only with some variation of the names. Either they prayed successively, according to that rule which the apostle gives, *1 Cor.* xiv. 31. *ye may all prophecy one by one.* Or, as some think, there were eight several congregations at some distance from each other, and each had a Levite to preside in it.

2. The work itself they employed themselves in; (1.) They prayed to God; cried to him with a loud voice, *ver.* 4. for the pardon of the sins of Israel, and God's favour to them. They cried aloud not that God might the better hear them, as Bala's worshippers, but that the people might, and to excite their fervency. (2.) They praised God. For the work of praise is not unreasonable on a fast-day; in all acts of devotion we must aim at this, *to give unto God the glory due to his name.*

The summary of their prayers we have here upon record; whether drawn up before, as a directory to the Levites what to enlarge on, or recollected after, as the heads of what they had in prayer enlarged upon, is uncertain. Much more no doubt was said than is here recorded, else confessing and worshipping God had not taken up a fourth part of the day, much less two fourths.

In this solemn address to God, we have,

1. An awful adoration of God, as a perfect and glorious being, and the fountain of all beings, *ver.* 5, 6. The congregation is called upon, to signify their concurrence herewith, by standing up, and so the minister directs himself to God, *blest be thy glorious name.* God is here adored, (1.) As the one only living and true God. *Thou art Jehovah alone,* self-existent and independent, there is no God besides thee. (2.) As the Creator of all things; *thou hast made heaven, earth, and seas,* and all that is in them. The first article of our creed is fitly made the first article of our praises. (3.) As the great protector of the whole creation; thou preservest in being all the creatures thou hast given being to. God's providences extends itself to the highest beings, for they need it, and to the meanest, for they are not slighted by it. What God has made he will preserve; what he doth is done firm, *Eccles.* iii. 14. (4.) As the object of the creature praises, *the host of heaven, the world of holy angels, worshippeth thee,* *ver.* 6. But thy name is exalted above all blessing and praise, it needs not the praises of the creatures, nor is any addition made to his glory by those praises. The best performances in the praising of God's name, even those of the angels themselves, fall infinitely short of what it deserves. It is not only exalted above our blessing, but above all blessing. Put all the praises of heaven and earth together; and the thousandth part is not said of what might and should be said of the glory of God. *Our goodness extendeth not to him.*

2. A thankful acknowledgment of God's favours to Israel, many of which are here reckoned up in order before him, and very much to the purpose, for (1.) We must take all occasions to mention the loving kindness of the Lord, and *in every prayer give thanks.* (2.) When we are confessing our sins, it is good to take notice of the mercies of God, as the aggravations of our sins, that we may be the more humbled and ashamed and call ourselves by the scandalous name of *ungrateful.* (3.) When we are seeking to God for mercy and relief in the time of distress, it is an encouragement to our faith and hope, to look back upon our own and our fathers experiences. Lord, thou hast done well for us formerly, shall it be all undone again? Art not thou the same God still?

Let us briefly observe the particular instances of God's goodness to Israel here recounted.

1. The call of Abraham, *ver.* 7. God's favour to him was distinguishing, thou didst choose him; his grace in him was powerful to bring him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and in giving him the name of Abraham, he put honour upon him as his own, and assured him that he should be the father of many nations. *Look unto Abraham your father,* *Isa.* li. 2. and see free grace glorified in him.

2. The covenant God made with him, to give the land of Canaan to him and his seed, a type of the better country, *ver.* 8. And this covenant was sure, for God found Abraham's heart faithful before God, and therefore found it so, because he made it so (for faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God) and therefore performed his words; *for with the upright he will shew himself upright,* and wherever he finds a faithful heart, he will be found a faithful God.

3. The deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, *ver.* 9, 10, 11. It was reasonable to remember this, now they were interceding for the perfecting of their deliverance out of Babylon. They were then delivered in compassion to their affliction, in answer to their cry, and in resistance of the pride and insolence of their persecutors: wherein they dealt proudly God shewed himself above them, *Exod.* xviii. 11. and so *gave him a name;* for he said, *I will get me honour upon Pharaoh;* even this day the name of God is glorified for that wonderful work. It was done miraculously; signs and wonders were shewed for the effecting of it; their deliverance was the destruction of their enemies; they were *thrown into the deeps* as irrecoverably as a stone into the mighty waters.

4. The conducting of them through the wilderness: by the pillar of cloud and fire, which shewed them both which way they should go, when they should remove, and when and where they should rest, directed all their stages and all their steps, *ver.* 12. And was also a visible token of God's presence with them to guide and guard them. They mention this again, *ver.* 19. observing, that though they had by their sins provoked God to withdraw from them, and leave them to wander and perish in the by-paths of the wilderness, yet in his manifold mercy he continued to lead them, and took not away the *pillar of cloud and fire,* *ver.* 19. When mercies though forfeited are continued, we are much obliged to be doubly thankful.

5. The plentiful provision made for them in the wilderness, that they might not perish for hunger, thou gavest them bread from heaven, and water out of the rock, (*ver.* 15.) and to hold up their hearts, a promise that they should go in and possess the land of Canaan. Meat and drink, food convenient in the way, and the good land in their journey's end, what would they more? This also is repeated, *ver.* 20, 21. as that which was continued, notwithstanding their provocations; *forty years didst thou sustain them,* never was people so long nursed, and so tenderly; it was wonder-

fully

fully provided, and in so long a time *their clothes waxed not old*, and though the way was rough and tedious, *their feet swelled not*, for they were *carried as upon eagles wings*.

6. The giving of the law upon mount Sinai. This was the greatest favour of all that was done, and the greatest honour that was put upon them. The lawgiver was very glorious, *ver. 13.* Thou didst not send only, but camest down thyself, and *spakest with them*, Deut. iv. 33. The law given was very good; no nation under the sun had such *right judgments, true laws and good statutes*, Deut. iv. 8. The moral and judicial precepts true and right, founded upon natural equity, and the eternal reasons of good and evil; and even the ceremonial institution good, token of God's goodness to them, the types of gospel grace. Particular notice is taken of the law of the fourth commandment as a great favour to them, *thou makest known unto them thy holy sabbath*, which was a token of God's particular favour to them, distinguishing them from the nations who revolted from God, and quite lost that ancient instance of revealed religion; and was likewise a means of keeping up their communion with him. And with *the law, and the sabbath he gave his good spirit to instruct them*, *ver. 20.* Besides the law given on mount Sinai, the five books of Moses, which he wrote *as he was moved by the Holy Ghost*, were constant instructions to them, particularly the book of Deuteronomy, in which God's Spirit, by Moses, instructed them fully. Bezaleel was filled *with the Spirit of God*, Exod. xxxi. 3. So was Joshua, *Numb. xxvii. 18.* and Caleb had another spirit.

7. The putting of them in possession of Canaan, that good land, *kingdoms and nations*, *ver. 22.* They were made so numerous as to replenish it, *ver. 23.* and so victorious as to be masters of it, *ver. 24.* the natives were given into their hands, *that they might do with them as they would*, set their feet if they pleased on the necks of their kings. Thus they gained a happy *settlement*, *ver. 25.* Look upon their cities, and you see them strong and well fortified. Look into their houses, and you find them fine and well furnished, filled with all sorts of rich goods. Take a view of the country, and you will say you never saw such a fat land so well stored with *vineyards and olive-yards*. All these they found made ready to their hands, so they delighted themselves in the gifts of God's great goodness. They could not wish to be more easy or happy than they were, or might have been in Canaan, had it not been their own fault.

8. God's great readiness to pardon their sins, and work deliverance for them, when they had by their provocations brought his judgments upon themselves. When they were in the wilderness, they found him *a God ready to pardon*, *ver. 17.* a God of pardons, so the margin reads it; who had proclaimed his name by this, *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*; who has power to forgive sin, is willing to forgive, and glories in it? though they forsook him, he did not forsake them, as justly he might have done, but continued his care of them, and favour to them. Afterwards when they were settled in Canaan, and sold themselves by their sins into the hands of their enemies, upon their submission and humble request he gave them *favours*, *ver. 27.* the judges, by whom God wrought many a great deliverance for them, when they were on the brink of ruin. This he did not for any merit of theirs, for they deserved nothing but ill, but according to his mercies, his manifold mercies.

9. The admonitions of fair warnings he gave them by his servants the prophets. When he delivered them from their troubles, he *testified against their sins*, *ver. 28, 29.* that they might not misconstrue their deliverances, as connivances at their wickedness. That which was designed in all the testimonies which the prophets bore against them, was to bring them again to God's law, to lay their necks under its yoke, and walk by its rule. The end of our ministry is to bring people to God, by bringing them to his law, not to bring them to ourselves, by bringing them under any law of ours. This we have again, *ver. 30.* *Thou testifiest against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets*. The testimony of the prophets was the testimony of the Spirit in the prophets, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them, *1 Pet. i. 10, 11.* They spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and what they said is to be received accordingly. God gave them his Spirit to instruct them, *ver. 20.* but they not receiving that instruction, he did by his Spirit testify against them; if we will not suffer God's word to teach and rule us, it will accuse and judge us. God sends prophets in compassion to his people, (*2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.*) that he may not send judgments.

10. The lengthening out of his patience, and the moderating of his rebukes. *Many years did he forbear them*, *ver. 30.* as loth to punish them, and waiting to see if they would repent, and when he did punish them, he did not *utterly consume them, nor forsake them*, *ver. 31.* Had he forsaken them they had been utterly consumed, but he did not stir up all his wrath, for he designed their reformation, not their destruction.

Thus do they multiply, thus do they magnify, the instances of God's goodness to Israel, and we should do in like manner, that the goodness of God, duly considered by us, may lead us to repentance, and overcome our badness; the more thankful we are for God's mercies, the more humbled we shall be for our own sins.

3. Here is a penitent confession of sin, their own sins, and the sins of their fathers. The mention of these is interwoven with the memorials of God's favours, that God's goodness, notwithstanding their provocations, might appear the more illustrious; and their sins, notwithstanding his favours, might appear the more heinous. Many passages in this acknowledgment of sins and mercies are taken from *Ezek. xx. 5—26.* as will appear by comparing those verses with these; for the word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, and by what he saith to us we may learn what to say to him.

(1.) They begin with the sins of Israel in the wilderness; *they, even our fathers*, (so it might better be read) *dealt proudly*, thou considering what they were, and how lately they were come out of slavery, they had no reason to be proud, and *hardened their necks*, *ver. 16.* Pride is at the bottom of mens obstinacy and disobedience; they think it below them to bow their necks to God's yoke, and a piece of state to set up their own will in opposition to the will of God himself. There were two things which they did not duly give heed to, else they had not done as they did. The word of God they heard, but they did not hearken to God's commandments. And the works of God, neither were they mindful of his wonders; had they duly considered them as miracles, they would have obeyed from a principle of faith and holy fear; had they duly considered them as mercies, they would have obeyed from a principle of gratitude and holy love. But when men make no right use either of God's ordinances, or of his providences, what can be expected from them? Two great sins are here instanced in which they were guilty of in the wilderness; meditating a return, (1.) To Egyptian slavery, which for the sake of the garlick and onions, they preferred before the glorious liberty of the Israel of God, attended with some difficulty and inconvenience. In their rebellion they appointed a captain to return to their bondage, in distrust of God's power, and contempt of his good promise, *ver. 17.* (2.) To Egyptian idolatry; they made a molten calf, and were so foolish as to say, *this is thy God*.

(2.) They next bewail the provocations of their fathers, after they were

put in possession of Canaan. Though there they delighted themselves in God's great goodness, yet that would not prevail to keep them tight to him, for nevertheless they were disobedient, *ver. 26.* and wrought great provocations. For, (1.) They abused God's prophets, *flew them*, because they testified against them, to turn them to God, *ver. 26.* So returning the greatest injury for the greatest kindness. (2.) They abused his favours, after they had rest, they did evil again, *ver. 28.* not wrought upon, either by their troubles, or their deliverances out of trouble. Neither fear nor love would hold them to their duty.

(3.) They at length come nearer to their own day, and lament the sins which had brought these judgments upon them, which they had long been groaning under, and were now but in part delivered from. *We have done wickedly*, *ver. 33.* Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers, have all been guilty, and we in them, *ver. 34.* Two things they charge upon themselves and their fathers, as the cause of their troubles, 1. A contempt of the good law God had given them. They sinned against thy judgments, the dictates of divine wisdom, and the demands of divine sovereignty: though they were told how much it would be for their own advantage to govern themselves by them, for *if a man do them he shall live by them*, *ver. 29.* yet they would not do them, and so in effect said, they would not live; they forsook their own mercies. This abridgment of the covenant, *do this and live*, is taken from *Ezek. xx. 13.* and is quoted *Gal. iii. 12.* to prove that the law is not of faith; it was not then as it is now, *believe and live*, yet they gave a withdrawing shoulder, so it is in the margin. They pretended to lay their shoulders under the burden of God's law, and put their shoulders to the work, but they proved withdrawing shoulders, they soon flew off, would not stick to it, would not abide by it; when it came (as we say) to the setting to, and shrunk back and would not hear; they had a backsliding heart. And though God by his prophets called them to return, they would not give ear, *ver. 30.* he stretched out his hands, but no man regarded. 2. A contempt of the good land God had given them, *ver. 35.* Our kings have not severed thee in their kingdom, nor used their power for the support of religion; our people have not served thee in the use of the gifts of the great goodness, and in that large and fat land which thou not only gavest them by thy grant, but gavest before them by the expulsion of the natives, and the complete victories they obtained over them. They that would not serve God in their own land, were made to serve their enemies in a strange land, as was threatened, *Deut. xxviii. 47, 48.* It is a pity a good land should have bad inhabitants, but so it was with Sodom; satness and fulness often make men proud and sensual.

4. Here is a humble representation of the judgments of God, which they had been and were now under.

(1.) Former judgments are remembered as aggravations of their sins, that they had not taken warning. In the days of the judges their enemies vexed them, *ver. 27.* And when they did evil again God did again leave them in the hand of their enemies, who could not have touched them, if God had not given them up; but when God left them, they got and kept dominion over them.

(2.) Their present calamitous state is laid before the Lord, *ver. 36, 37.* *We are servants this day.* Free-born Israelites are enslaved, and the land which they had long held by a much more honourable tenure than grand serjeantry itself, even by immediate grant from the crown of heaven, to them as a peculiar people above all people of the earth, they now held by as base a tenure as villainage itself, by, from, and under the kings of Persia, whose vassals they were. A sad change! but see what work sin makes! They were bound to personal service; they have dominion over our bodies; they held all they had precariously, were tenants at will, and their land-tax that they paid was so great, that it amounted even to a rack-rent; so that all the rents, issues, and profits of their land did in effect accrue to the king, and it was as much as they could do to get a bare subsistence for themselves and their families out of it; this they honestly own was for their sins; poverty and slavery are the fruits of sin: that brings us into all our difficulties.

3. Here is their address to God upon these calamities.

1. By way of request, that their trouble might not seem little, *ver. 32.* It is the only petition in all this prayer. The trouble was universal, it is come on our kings, princes, priests, prophets, fathers, and all our people; they had all shared in the sin, *ver. 34.* and now all shared in the judgment. It was of long continuance, from the time of the kings of Assyria, who carried the ten tribes captive, unto this day; Lord, let it not all seem little, and not worthy to be regarded, or not needed to be relieved. They do not prescribe to God what he shall do for them, but leave it to him, only desiring he would please to take cognizance of it, remembering that when he saw the affliction of his people in Egypt to be great, he came down to deliver them, *Exod. iii. 7.* In this request they have an eye to God, as one that is to be feared, for he is the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, and one that is to be trusted, for he is our God in covenant, and a God that keeps covenant and mercy.

2. By the way of acknowledgment notwithstanding, that really it was less than they deserved, *ver. 33.* They own the justice of God in all their troubles, that he had done them no wrong; we have done wickedly in breaking thy laws, and therefore thou hast done right in bringing all these miseries upon us. Note, It becomes us when we are under the rebukes of the divine providence, though never so sharp, and never so long, to justify God, and to judge ourselves: for he will be clear when he judgeth, *Psal. ii. 4.*

3. Here is the result and conclusion of this whole matter; after this long remonstrance of their case was made, they came at last to this resolution that they would return to God, and to their duty, and oblige themselves never to forsake God, but always to continue in their duty. Because of all this we make a sure covenant with God; in consideration of our frequent departures from God, we will now more firmly than ever bind ourselves to him. Because we have sinned so much for sin, we will now steadfastly resolve against it, that we may not any more withdraw the shoulder. Observe, 1. This covenant was made with serious consideration; it is the result of a chain of suitable thoughts, and so is a reasonable service. 2. With great solemnity. It was written in *perpetuum rei memoriam*, it was sealed to, and left upon record, that it might be a witness against them if they dealt deceitfully. 3. With joint consent: We make it, we are all agreed in it, and do it unanimously, that we may strengthen the hands of one another. 4. With fixed resolution, it is a sure covenant, without reserving a power of revocation. It is what we will live and die by, and never go back from. A certain number of the princes, priests, and Levites, were chosen as the representatives of the congregation, to subscribe and seal it, for and in the name of the rest. Now was fulfilled that promise concerning the Jews that when they were returned out of captivity, they should join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, *Jer. xl. 5.* and that *Isa. xlv. 5.* that they should subscribe with their hand unto the Lord; and he that bears an honest mind will not startle at assurances; nor will those that know the deceitfulness of their own hearts think them needless.

C H A P. X.

We have in this chapter a particular account of the covenant which in the close of the foregoing chapter was resolved upon; they struck while the iron was hot, and immediately put that good resolve in execution, when they were in a good frame, lest if it had been delayed it had been dropped. Here is, (1.) The names of those that set their hands and seals to it, ver. 1—27. (2.) An account of those who signified their consent and concurrence, ver. 28, 29. (3.) The covenant itself, and the articles of it in general, that they would keep God's commandments, ver. 29, in particular, that they would not marry with the heathen, ver. 30. nor profane the sabbath, or be rigorous with their debtors, ver. 31. And that they would carefully pay their church-duties, for the maintenance of the temple service, which they promise faithfully to adhere to, ver. 32—39.

1. **N**OW those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah, 2. Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3. Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4. Hattai, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5. Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6. Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7. Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8. Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were the priests. 9. And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; 10. And their brethren Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11. Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12. Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13. Hodijah, Bani, Zennur. 14. The chief of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15. Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16. Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17. Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur, 18. Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai. 19. Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20. Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21. Meshazbeel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22. Pelatiah, Havaiah, Ananiah, 23. Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub, 24. Hallohefi: Pileha, Shobek, 25. Rehun, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26. And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, 27. Malluch, Harim, Baanah. 28. ¶ And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands, unto the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding: 29. They came to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our God, and his judgment and his statutes: 30. And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: 31. And if the people of the land bring ware, or any victuals on the sabbath-day, to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy-day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

When Israel was first brought into covenant with God, it was done by sacrifice, and the sprinkling of blood, *Exod. xxiv.* But here it was done by the more natural and common way of sealing and subscribing the written articles of the covenant, which bound them to no more than was already their duty.

Now here we have,

1. The names of those public persons who, as the representatives and heads of the congregation, set their hands and seals to this covenant, because it would have been an endless piece of work for every particular person to have done it. And if these leading men did their part in pursuance of this covenant, it would have a good influence upon all the people.

Now observe, (1.) Nehemiah, who was the governor, signed first, to shew his forwardness in his work, and to set others a good example, *ver. 1.* Those that are above others in dignity and power, should go before them in the way of God. (2.) Next to him subscribed twenty-two priests, among whom I wonder we do not find Ezra, who was an active man in the solemnity, *chap. viii. 2.* which was but this first day of the same month, and therefore we cannot think he was absent, but he having before done his part as a scribe, now left it to others to do theirs. (3.) Next to the priests, seventeen Levites subscribed this covenant, among whom we find all or most of those who were the mouth of the congregation in prayer, *chap. ix. 4, 5.* Which shewed that they themselves were affected with what they had said, and would not bind those burdens on others which they themselves declined to touch. They that lead in prayer should lead in every other good work. (4.) Next to the Levites, forty-four of the chief of the people gave it under their hands for themselves and all the rest, chiefly those whom they had influence upon, that they would keep God's commandments. Their names are left upon record here to their honour, as men that were forward and active, in reviving and endeavouring to perpetuate religion in their country; the memory of such shall be blessed. It is observable that most of those who were mentioned *chap. viii. 8,* &c. as heads of houses or clans are here mentioned among the first of the chief of the people that subscribed; whoever was the present head bearing the name of him that was head when they came out of Babylon, and these were fittest to subscribe for all those of their father's house. Here is Harosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, *ver. 14.* Azgad, Bebai, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, and some others in the following verses, that are all found in that catalogue. They that have interest must use it for God.

2. The concurrence of the rest of the people with them, and the rest of the priests and Levites, who signified their consent to what their chiefs did. With them joined, (1.) Their wives and children, for they had transgressed, and they must reform; every one that had knowledge and un-

derstanding must covenant with God. As soon as young people grow up to be capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and of acting intelligently, they ought to make it their own act and deed, to join themselves to the Lord. (2.) The proselytes of other nations, all that had separated themselves from the people of the lands their gods and their worship, under the law of God, and the observance of that law. See what conversation is, it is separating ourselves from the course and custom of this world, and devoting ourselves to the conduct of the word of God. And as there is one law, so there is one covenant, one baptism for the stranger, and for him that is born in the land.

Observe how the concurrence of the people is expressed, *ver. 29.* (1.) They came to their brethren; one and all. Here whom the court blessed the country blessed too! The commonalty agreed with their nobles in this good work. Great men never look so great, as when they encourage religion and are examples of it; and they would by that, as much as any thing, make an interest in the most valuable of their inferiors. Let but the nobles cordially espouse religious causes, perhaps they will find people cleave to them therein closer than they can imagine. Observe their nobles are called their brethren, for in the things of God rich and poor, high and low meet together. (2.) They entered into a curse and an oath. As the nobles confirmed the covenant with their hands and seals, so the people with a curse and an oath; solemnly appealing to God concerning their sincerity, and imprecating his just revenge if they dealt deceitfully. Every oath has in it a conditional curse upon the soul, which makes it a strong bond upon the soul; for our tongues, if false and lying tongues, will fall and fall heavy upon ourselves.

3. The general purport of this covenant. They laid upon themselves no other burden but this necessary thing, which they were already obliged to by all other engagements, of duty, interest and gratitude, to walk in God's law and do all his commandments, *ver. 29.* This was it which David swore, that he would keep God's righteous judgments, *Psalm. cxix. 106.* Our own covenant binds us to this, if not more strongly, yet more sensibly than we were before bound; and therefore we must not think it needless thus to bind ourselves to do all the commandments of God; and therein to have an eye to him as the Lord, and our Lord.

4. Some of the particular articles of this covenant. Such as were adapted to their present temptations.

1. That they would not intermarry with the heathen, *ver. 30.* Many of them had been guilty of this; *Ezra ix. 1.* In our covenants with God, we should engage particularly against those sins that we have been most frequently overtaken in, and damaged by. They that resolve to keep the commandments of God, must say to evil doers, depart, *Psalm. cxix. 115.*

2. They that would keep no markets on the sabbath-day, or any other day of which the law had said, *ye shall do no work therein.* They would not only not sell goods themselves for gain on that day, but they would not encourage the heathen to sell on that day, by buying of them; no not victuals, under pretence of necessity; but would buy in their provisions for their families the day before, *ver. 31.* Note, Those that covenant to keep all God's commandments, must particularly covenant to keep sabbaths well, for the profanation of them is an inlet to other instances of profaneness. The sabbath is a market day for our souls, but not for our bodies.

3. That they would not be severe in exacting their debts, but would observe the seventh year as a year of release, according to the law, *ver. 31.* In this matter they had been faulty, *chap. v.* and here therefore they promise to reform. This was the acceptable suit to undo the heavy burden, and to let the oppressed go free, *Isa. lviii. 6.* It was in the close of the day of expiation, that the jubilee trumpet sounded. It was for the neglect of observing the seventh year as a year of rest for the land, that God had made it enjoy its sabbaths seventy years, *Lev. xxvi. 35.* and therefore they covenant to observe that law. Those are stubborn children indeed, that will not amend the fault which they have been particularly corrected for.

32. Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel, for the service of the house of our God. 33. For the shew-bread, and for the continual meat-offering, and for the continual burnt-offering of the sabbaths, of the new moons for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin-offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. 34. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood-offering to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed, year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law: 35. And to bring the first-fruits of our ground, and the first-fruits of all fruits of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD: 36. Also the first-born of our sons and of our cattle, (as it is written in the law) and the firstlings of our herds, and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God: 37. And that we should bring the first-fruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine, and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. 38. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure-house. 39. For the children of Israel, and the children of Levi, shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priest, that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

Having covenanted against the sins they had been guilty of they proceed in obliging themselves to revive and observe the duties they had neglected. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well.

1. It was resolved in general, that the temple service should be carefully kept up, that the work of the house of their God should be done in its season, according to the law, *ver.* 33. Let not any people expect the blessing of God, unless they make conscience of observing his ordinances, and keeping up the public worship of him. Then it is likely to go well with our houses, when care is taken that the works of God's house go on well. It was likewise resolved, that they would never *forfake the house of their God*, *ver.* 39. as they and their fathers had done; nor forsake it for the house of any other god, or for the high places, as idolaters did; nor forsake it for their farms and merchandises, as those did that were atheistical and profane. They that forsake the worship of God, forsake God.

2. It was resolved in pursuance of this, that they would liberally maintain the temple-service, and not starve it. The priests were ready to do their part in all the work of God's house, if the people would do theirs, which was to find them materials to work upon. Now here it was agreed and concluded,

1. That a stock should be raised for the furnishing of God's table and altar plentifully. Formerly there were treasures in the house of the Lord for this purpose, but those were gone, and there was no settled fund to supply the want of them; it was a constant charge to provide shew-bread for the table, two lambs for the daily offerings, four for the sabbaths, and more and more costly sacrifices for other festivals, occasional sin-offerings, and meat-offerings, and drink-offerings for them all; they had no rich king to provide these, as Hezekiah did: the priests could not afford it, their maintenance was so small. The people therefore agreed to contribute yearly each of them the third part of a shekel, about ten-pence a-piece, for the bearing of this expence. When every one will act, and every one will give, though but little towards a good work, it will amount to something in the whole. The Tithing did not impose this tax, but the people made it an ordinance for themselves, and charged themselves with it, *ver.* 32, 33.

2. That particular care should be taken to provide wood for the altar, to keep the fire always a burning upon it; and wherewith to boil the peace-offerings; Each of them priests and Levites, as well as people, agreed to bring in their quota, and cast lots in what order they should bring it in, which family first, and which next, that there might be a constant supply, and not a scarcity at one time, and an overplus at another, *ver.* 34. Thus they provided the fire and the wood, as well as the lambs for the burnt-offerings.

3. That all those things which the divine law had appointed for the maintenance of the priests and Levites, should be duly paid in, for their encouragement to mind their business, and that they might not be under any temptation to neglect it, for the making of necessary provision for their families. Then the work of the house of God is likely to go on, when those that serve at the altar live, and live comfortably upon the altar. First-fruits and tithes were then the principal branches of the ministers revenues; and they here resolve, (1.) To bring in their first-fruits justly, of their ground and trees, *Exod.* xxiii. 19. *Lev.* xix. 23. The first-born of their children, even the money wherewith they were to be redeemed; and of their cattle, *Exod.* xiii. 2, 11, 12. This was given to the priests, *Num.* xviii. 15, 16. Also the first-fruits of their dough, *Num.* xv. 21. Concerning which there is a particular order given in the prophecy concerning the second temple, *Ezek.* xlv. 30. (2.) To bring in their tithes likewise, which were due to the Levites, *ver.* 37. and a tenth out of those tithes to the priest, *ver.* 38. This was the law, *Num.* xviii. 21—28. But these dues had been withheld, for which God by the prophet charged them with *robbing him*, *Mal.* iii. 8, 9. and encouraged them to be more just to him and his receivers, with a promise that if they brought the *tithes into the store-house* he would *pour out blessings upon them*, *ver.* 10. This therefore they resolve to do, that there might be meat in God's house, and plenty in the store-chambers of the temple, where the vessels of the sanctuary were, *ver.* 39. We will not do it (say they) *in all the cities of our village*, *ver.* 37. *In all the cities of our servitude*, to the LXX. for they were servants in their own land, *chap.* ix. 36. But (as Mr. Poole well observes) though they paid great taxes to the kings of Persia, and had much hardships put upon them, they would not make that an excuse for not paying their tithes, but would render to God the things that were his, as well as to Cæsar the things that were his. We must do what we can in works of piety and charity, notwithstanding the taxes we pay to the government; and cheerfully perform our duty to God in our servitude, which will be the surest way to ease and liberty in God's due time.

C H A P. XI.

Jerusalem was walled round, but it was not as yet fully inhabited, and therefore weak and despicable. Nehemiah's next care is to bring people into it, of that we have here an account. (1.) The methods taken to replenish it, ver. 1, 2. (2.) The principal persons that resided there, of Judah and Benjamin, ver. 3—9. Of the priests and Levites, ver. 10—19. (3.) The several cities and villages of Judah and Benjamin, that were peopled by the rest of their families, ver. 20—36.

1. **A**ND the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. 2. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. 3. ¶ Now these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants. 4. And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaheel, of the children of Perez; 5. And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaijah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni, 6. All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem, were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men. 7. And these are the sons of Benjamin, Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed; the son of Pedaijah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah. 8. And after him Gabbai, Sallai,

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nine hundred twenty and eight. 9. And Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer: and Judah the son of Senuah, was second over the city. 10. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin. 11. Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, was the ruler of the house of God. 12. And their brethren that did the work of the house, were eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaijah the son of Jehoram, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah, 13. And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two: and Amashai, the son of Azareel, the son of Ahafai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, 14. And their brethren mighty men of valour an hundred twenty and eight; and their overseer was Zabdiel the son of one of the great men. 15. Also of the Levites; Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni. 16. And Shabbethai, and Jozabad of the chief of the Levites, had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God. 17. And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer; and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galai, the son of Jeduthun. 18. All the Levites in the holy city, were two hundred fourscore and four. 19. Moreover, the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, were an hundred seventy and two.

Jerusalem is called here the *holy city*, *ver.* 1. because there the temple was, and that was the place God had chosen to put his name there; upon this account one would think the holy seed should have all chosen to dwell there, and have striven for a habitation there; but, on the contrary, it seems they declined dwelling there; either, (1.) because a greater strictness of conversation was expected from the inhabitants of Jerusalem than from others, which they were not willing to come up to; those who care not for being holy themselves, are shy of dwelling in a holy city: they would not dwell in the *New Jerusalem* itself for that reason, but would wish to have a continuing city here upon earth. Or (2.) Because Jerusalem of all places was most hated by the heathen their neighbours, and against it their malicious designs were levelled, which made that the post of danger, as the post of honour uses to be, and therefore they were not willing to expose themselves there. Fear of persecution and reproach, and running themselves into trouble, keeps many out of the holy city, and makes them backward to appear for God and religion, not considering that as Jerusalem is with a special malice threatened and insulted by its enemies, so it is with a special care protected by its God, and made a *quiet habitation*, *Psal.* xlv. 4, 5. Or (3.) Because it was more for their worldly advantage to dwell in the country. Jerusalem was no trading city, and therefore there was no money to be got there by merchandises, as there was in the country by corn and cattle. Note, All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's, *Phil.* ii. 21. It is a general and just complaint, that most people prefer their own wealth, credit, pleasure, ease and safety, before the glory of God and the public good.

People being thus backward to dwell at Jerusalem, now it was poor, we are here told,

1. By what means it was replenished. (1.) The rulers dwelt there, *ver.* 1. That was the proper place for them to reside in, *because there were set the thrones of judgment*, *Psal.* cxxii. 5. and thither in all difficult matters the people resorted with their last appeals. And if it were an instance of eminent affection to the house of God, zeal for the public good, and of faith and holy courage and self-denial, to dwell there at this time, the rulers that would be examples of these to their inferiors. Their dwelling there would invite and encourage others to dwell there too: *Magnates Magnates*. When great men would choose the holy city for their habitation, it brings holiness into reputation, and their zeal will provoke very many. (2.) There went some that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem, bravely postponing their own secular interest to the public welfare, *ver.* 2. It is upon record to their honour, that when others were shy of venturing upon difficulty, loss and danger, they sought the good of Jerusalem, *because of the house of the Lord their God: They shall prosper that thus love Zion*, *Psal.* cxx. 6, 9. It is said, *the people blessed them*. They praised them, they prayed for them, they praised God for them. Many that do not appear forward themselves for the public good, will yet give a good word for those that do. God and man will bless those that are public blessings, which should encourage us to be zealous in doing good. (3.) They finding that yet there was room, concluded upon a review of their whole body, to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem, and who they should be, was determined by lot, the disposal whereof all knew was of the Lord. This would prevent strife, and would be a great satisfaction to those on whom the lot fell to dwell at Jerusalem, that they plainly saw God appointing the bounds of their habitation. The proportion they observed one in ten, as we may suppose it, to bring the balance between the city and country to a just and equal poise, so it seems to refer to the ancient rule of giving the tenth to God; and what is given to the holy city, he reckons given to himself.

2. By what persons it was replenished. A general account is here given of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, because the *governors of Judah* looked upon them as *their strength in the Lord of Hosts their God*, and valued them accordingly, *Zech.* xii. 5.

1. Many of the children of Judah and Benjamin dwelt there, for originally part of the city lay in the lot of one of those tribes, and part in that of the other; but the greater part was in the lot of Benjamin, and therefore here we find of the children of Judah but four hundred sixty-eight families in Jerusalem, *ver.* 6. but of Benjamin nine hundred twenty-eight, *ver.* 6—8. Thus small were its beginnings, but afterwards, before our Saviour's time, it grew much more populous. Those of Judah all descended from Perez or Pharez, the son of Judah, of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came. And though the Benjamites were more in number, yet of the men of Judah it is said, *ver.* 6. they were valiant men, fit for service, and able to defend the city in case of an attack. Judah has not lost its ancient character of a lion's whelp bold and daring.

Of the Benjamites that dwelt in Jerusalem, we are here told who was overseer, and who is second, *ver. 9.* For it is as necessary for a people to have good order kept up among themselves, as to be fortified against the attacks of their enemies from abroad; to have good magistrates as to have good soldiers.

2. The priests and Levites did many of them settle at Jerusalem; where else should men that were holy to God dwell but in the holy city?

1. Most of the priests we may suppose dwelt there, for their business lay where the temple was. Of them that did the work of the house in their courses, here were eight hundred twenty-two of one family, two hundred forty-two of another, and one hundred twenty-eight of another, *ver. 12, 13, 14.* It was well those labourers were not few. It is said of some of them, that they were *mighty men of valour*, *ver. 14.* and so they had need, for the priesthood was not only a work which required might, but a warfare, which required valour, especially now. Of one of these priests, it is said, he was *the son of one of the great men*: And it was no disparagement to the greatest men they had, to have his son in the priesthood; he might magnify his office, for his office did not in the least diminish him.

2. Some of the Levites also came and dwelt at Jerusalem, yet but few in comparison, two hundred eighty-four in all, *ver. 8.* with one hundred seventy-two porters, *ver. 19.* Because much of their work was to *teach the good knowledge of God* up and down the country, for which purpose they were to be scattered in Israel: as many as there was occasion for attended at Jerusalem, the rest were doing good elsewhere. (1.) It is said of one of the Levites, that he had *the oversight of the outward business of the house of God*, *ver. 16.* The priests were chief managers of the business within the temple-gates; but this Levite was intrusted with the secular concerns of God's house, that were *in ordine ad spiritualia*, the collecting of the contributions, the providing of materials for the temple-service, and the like, which it was necessary to oversee, else the inward business would have been starved and stood still. Those that take care of the *res æcclæ* of the church, the serving of its tables, are as necessary in their place, as those that take care of its *res cœlæ*, who give themselves to the word and prayer: (2.) It is said of another, that he was *the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer*: It is likely he had a good ear and a good voice, and was an artist at singing, and therefore was chosen to lead the psalm. He was precursor in the temple. Observe; Thanksgiving is necessary in prayer; they should go together: giving thanks for the former mercies is a decent way of begging further mercies. And care should be taken in public service, that every thing be done in the best manner, *decently and in good order*; in prayer that one speak, and the rest join; in singing that one begin, and the rest follow.

20. ¶ And the residue of Israel, of the priests, and the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance. 21. But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziah and Gispah were over the Nethinims. 22. The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha: of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God. 23. For it was the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day. 24. And Pethathiah the son of Meshezbeel, of the children of Zerah, the son of Judah, was at the king's hand, in all matters concerning the people. 25. And for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjath-arba, and in the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and in the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and in the villages thereof. 26. And at Jeshua, and at Moladah, and at Beth-phelet. 27. And at Hazar-shual, and at Beer-sheba, and in the villages thereof. 28. And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and in the villages thereof. 29. And at En-rimmon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth. 30. Zanoah, Adullam, and in their villages, at Lachish, and in the fields thereof, at Azekah, and in the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beer-sheba, unto the valley of Hinnom. 31. The children also of Benjamin, from Geba, dwelt at Michmash, and Aija, and Beth-el, and in their villages. 32. And at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah. 33. Hazer, Ramah, Gittaim. 34. Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat. 35. Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen. 36. And of the Levites, were divisions in Judah, and in Benjamin.

Having given an account of the principal persons that dwelt in Jerusalem, a larger account of whom we had before, 1 *Chron. ix. 2, &c.* Nehemiah in these verses gives us some account of the other cities, in which dwelt the residue of Israel, *ver. 20.* It was requisite Jerusalem should be replenished, yet not to us to drain the country; *the king himself is served of the field*, which will do little service if there be not hands to manage it: let there therefore be no strife, no envy, no contempt, no ill-will, between the inhabitants of the cities and those of the villages, both are needful, both useful, and neither can be spared.

1. The Nethinims, the posterity of the Gibeonites, dwelt in Ophel, which was upon the wall of Jerusalem, *chap. iii. 26.* because they were to do the servile work of the temple, which therefore they must be posted near to, that they might be ready to attend, *ver. 21.*

2. Though the Levites were dispersed throughout the cities of Judah, yet they had an overseer who resided at Jerusalem, superior of their order, and their provincial, to whom they applied themselves for direction, who took care of their affairs, and took cognisance of their carriage, whether they did their duty, *ver. 22.*

3. Some of the singers were appointed to look after the necessary repairs of the temple, being ingenious men, and having leisure betwixt their hours of service: they were *over the business of the house of God*, *ver. 23.* And it seems the king of Persia had such a kindness for their office, that he allotted a particular maintenance for them, besides what belonged to them as Levites, *ver. 23.*

4. Here is one that was the king's commissioner at Jerusalem, he was of the posterity of Zerubbabel, *ver. 24.* For of that family of Judah, there were some now settled in Jerusalem, and not all of Pharez, as appears by that

other catalogue, 1 *Chron. ix. 6.* He is said to be at the king's hand, or on the king's part, in all matters concerning the people, to determine controversies that arose between the king's officers and his subjects; to see that what was due to the king from the people was duly paid in, and what was allowed by the king for the temple service was duly paid out; and happy it was for the Jews, that one of themselves was in this post.

5. Here is an account of the villages or country towns, which were inhabited by the residue of Israel. The towns in which the children of Judah dwelt, *ver. 25—30.* And those that were inhabited by the children of Benjamin, *ver. 31—35.* And divisions for the Levites among both, *ver. 36.* We will now suppose them safe and easy, though few and poor, but, by the blessing of God, likely to increase in wealth and power; and more likely if there had not been that general profaneness among them, and lukewarmness in religion, which the prophet Malachi charged them with in God's name, who, it is supposed, prophesied about this time, and in whom prophecy ceased for some ages, till it revived in the great prophet and his forerunner.

C H A P. XII.

In this chapter is preserved upon record, (1.) The names of the chief of the priests and the Levites that came up with Zerubbabel, *ver. 1—9.* (2.) The succession of the high priests, *ver. 10, 11.* (3.) The names of the next generation of the other chief priests, *ver. 12—21.* (4.) The eminent Levites that were in Nehemiah's time, *ver. 22—26.* (5.) The solemnity of dedicating the wall of Jerusalem, *ver. 27—43.* (6.) The settling of the offices of the priests and Levites in the Temple, *ver. 44—47.*

1. NOW these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2. Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3. Schechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4. Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah, 5. Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6. Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7. Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah: these were the chief of the priests, and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua, 8. Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. 9. Also Bakbukiah, and Unni, their brethren, were over against them in the watches. 10. ¶ And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, 11. And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua. 12. And in the days of Joiakim, were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah: of Jeremiah, Hananiah: 13. Of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan: 14. Of Melicu, Jonathan: of Shebaniah, Joseph: 15. Of Harim, Adnah; of Meraioth, Helkai: 16. Of Iddo, Zechariah: of Ginnethon, Meshullam: 17. Of Abijah, Zichri: of Miamin, of Moadiah, Piltai: 18. Of Bilgah, Shammua: of Shemaiah, Jehonathan: 19. And of Joiarib, Mattenai: of Jedaiah, Uzzi: 20. Of Sallai, Kallai: of Amok, Eber: 21. Of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah: of Jedaiah, Nethaneel. 22. ¶ The Levites in the days of Eliashib: Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers; also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian. 23. The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the Chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. 24. And the chief of the Levites; Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel: with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. 25. Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters, keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates. 26. These were in the days of Joiakim, the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

We have here the names, and little more than the names of a great many priests and Levites, that were eminent in their day among the returned Jews. Why this register should be here inserted by Nehemiah, doth not appear: perhaps to keep in remembrance those good men, that posterity might know to whom they were beholden, under God, for the happy revival and re-establishment of their religion among them. Thus must we contribute towards the performance of that promise, *Psal. cxii. 6.* that the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. Let the memory of the just be blessed, be perpetuated. It is a debt we still owe to faithful ministers, to remember our guides, who have spoken to us the word of God, *Heb. xiii. 7.* Perhaps it is intended to stir up their posterity, who succeeded them in the priests office, and inherited their dignities and preferments, to imitate their courage and fidelity. It is good to know what our godly ancestors and predecessors were, that we may learn thereby what we should be. We have here,

1. The names of the priests and Levites that came up with the first out of Babylon when Jeshua was high-priest. Jeremiah and Ezra mentioned with the first, *ver. 1.* but it is supposed, not Jeremiah the prophet, or Ezra the scribe, the fame of the one was long before, and the other some time after, though both of them were priests, but two others of the same names. Of one of the Levites it is said, *ver. 8.* that he was *over the thanksgiving*, i. e. He was entrusted to see that the psalms, the thanksgiving psalms, were constantly sung in the temple in due time and manner. The Levites kept their turns in their watches, relieving one another as becomes brethren, fellow-labourers, and fellow-soldiers.

2. The succession of high-priests during the Persian monarchy, from Jeshua

Jeshua (or Jesus) who was high-priest at the time of the restoration, to Jaddua (or Jaddus) who was high-priest, when Alexander the Great after the conquest of Tyre came to Jerusalem, and paid great respect to this Jaddus, who met him in his pontifical habit, and shewed him the prophecy of Daniel which foretold his conquests.

3. The next generation of priests, who were chief men, and active in the days of Joiakim, sons of the first set. Note, We have reason to acknowledge God's favour to his church, and care of it, in that as one generation of ministers passeth away, another comes. All these who are mentioned, *ver. 1. &c.* as eminent in their generation, are again mentioned (though with some variation in several of the names, *ver. 12, &c.* except two, as having sons that were likewise eminent in their generation; a rare instance that twenty good fathers should leave behind them twenty good sons (for so many here are) that filled up their places.

4. The next generation of Levites, or rather a latter generation; for those priests mentioned flourished in the days of Joiakim, the high-priest, these Levites in the days of Eliashib, *ver. 22.* Perhaps then the fore-mentioned families of the priests began to degenerate, and the third generation of them came short of the two first, but the work of God shall never fail for want of instruments. Then a generation of Levites was *raised up*, that were *recorded chief of the fathers*, *ver. 22.* and were eminently serviceable to the interests of the church, and their service not the less acceptable either to God or to his people, for their being Levites only of the lower rank of ministers. Eliashib the high-priest being allied to Tobiah, *chap. xiii. 4.* the other priests, grew remiss, but then the Levites appeared the more zealous as appears by this, that those who were now employed in expounding, *chap. viii. 7.* and in praying, *chap. ix. 4, 5.* were all Levites, not priests, regard being had to their personal qualifications more than to their order. These Levites were some of them singers, *ver. 24. praise and give thanks*, others of them porters, *ver. 25. keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gate; and both according to the command of David.*

27. ¶ And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. 28. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country, round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi, 29. Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba, and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. 30. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates and the wall. 31. Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, where of one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung-gate: 32. And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, 33. And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, 34. Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, 35. And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets: namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph: 36. And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarai, Malalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah. Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. 37. And at the fountain-gate which was over-against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water-gate eastward: 38. And the other company of them that gave thanks, went over against them, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces, even unto the broad wall: 39. And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish-gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep-gate: and they stood still in the prison-gate. 40. So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: 41. And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah with trumpets: 42. And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer: and the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. 43. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

We have read of the building of the wall of Jerusalem, with a great deal of fear and trembling, we have here an account of the dedicating of it with a great deal of joy and triumph. They that *sow in tears shall thus reap.*

1. We must inquire what was the meaning of this dedication of the wall: we will suppose it to include the dedication of the city too, (*contingens pro contento*) and therefore it was not done till the city was pretty well replenished, *chap. xi.* (1.) It was a solemn thanksgiving to God for his great mercy to them, in the perfecting of this undertaking, which they were the more sensible of, because of the difficulty and opposition they had met with in it. (2.) They hereby devoted the city in a peculiar manner to God and to his honour, and took possession of it for him and in his name. All our cities, all our houses, must have holiness to the Lord written upon them, but this city was (so as never any other was) a *holy city*, the city of the great king, *Psal. xlviii. 2.* and *Matt. v. 35.* it had been so ever since God chose it

to put his name there, and as such it being now refitted, it was afresh dedicated to God by the builders and inhabitants, in token of their acknowledgment that they were his tenants, and their desire that it might still be his, and that the property of it might never be altered. Whatever is done for their safety, ease, and comfort, must be designed for God's honour and glory. (3.) They hereby put the city and its walls under the divine protection, owning that *unless the Lord kept the city*, the walls were *built in vain*. When the city was in possession of the Jebusites, they committed the guardianship of it to their gods, though they were blind and lame ones, *2 Sam. v. 6.* With much more reason do the people of God commit it to his keeping, who is All-wise and All-mighty. The superstitious founders of cities, had an eye to the lucky position of the heavens, (see Mr. Gregory's works, *page 29, &c.*) but these pious founders had an eye to God only, to his providence, and not to fortune.

2. We must observe with what solemnity it was performed under the direction of Nehemiah.

1. The Levites from all parts of the country were summoned to attend. The city must be dedicated to God, and therefore his ministers must be employed in the doing of it, and the surrender must pass through their hands. When those solemn feasts were over, *chap. viii. and ix.* they were gone home to their respective posts, to mind their cures in the country; but now their presence and assistance was again called for.

2. Pursuant to those summons there was a general rendezvous of all the Levites, *ver. 28, 29.* And observe in what method they proceeded.

(1.) They *purified themselves*, *ver. 30.* We are concerned to *cleanse our hands*, and *purify our hearts*, when any work for God is to pass through them. Themselves they purified, and then the people; they that would be instrumental to sanctify others, must sanctify themselves, and set themselves apart for God, with purity of mind and sincerity of attention. Then they purified the gates and the wall. Then may we expect comfort, when we are prepared to receive it. *To the pure all things are pure*, *Tit. i. 15.* And to them who are sanctified, house and tables, and all their creature-comforts and enjoyments are sanctified, *1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.* This purification was performed, by sprinkling the water of purifying or of separation, (as it is called, *Numb. xix. 9.*) on themselves and the people, the walls and the gates; a type of the blood of Christ, with which our consciences being purged from dead works, we become fit to serve the living God, *Heb. ix. 14.* and to be his care.

(2.) The princes, priests, and Levites, walked round upon the wall in two companies, to signify the dedication of it all to God, the whole circuit of it, with *musical instruments*, *ver. 36.* So that it is likely they sung psalms as they went along, to the praise and glory of God. This procession is here largely described. They had a rendezvous at one certain place, where they divided themselves into two companies. Half of the princes, with several priests and Levites, went on the right hand, Ezra leading their van, *ver. 36.* The other half of the princes and priests, who gave thanks, likewise went to the left hand, Nehemiah bringing up the rear, *ver. 38.* And at length both companies met in the temple, where they joined their thanksgiving, *ver. 40.* The crowd of people, it is likely, walked on the ground, some within the wall, and others without, one end of this ceremony being to affect them with the mercy they were giving thanks for, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it among them, and for that intent such cavalcades have their use.

(3.) The people greatly rejoiced, *ver. 43.* While the princes, priests and Levites, testify their joy and thankfulness, by great sacrifices, sound of trumpet, musical instruments, and songs of praise, the common people testified theirs by loud shouts, which were heard afar off, farther than the more harmonious sound of their songs and music; and these shouts coming from a sincere and hearty joy are here taken notice of: for God overlooks not, but graciously accepts the honest zealous services of mean people, though there be in them little of art, and they are far from being fine. It is observed, that the women and children rejoiced, and their Halleluhs were not despised, but recorded to their praise. All that shure in public mercies, ought to join in public thanksgivings. The reason given is, that *God hath made them rejoice with great joy*; he had given them both matter for joy, and hearts to rejoice; his providence had made them safe and easy, and then his grace made them cheerful and thankful. The baffled opposition of their enemies, no doubt, added to their joy, and mixed triumph with it. Great mercies call for the most solemn returns of praise, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.

44. ¶ And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings of the first-fruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests, and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests, and for the Levites that waited. 45. And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. 46. For in the days of David and Asaph of old, there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. 47. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers, and the porters every day his portion, and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites, and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron.

We have here an account of the remaining good effects of the universal joy that was at the dedication of the wall. When the solemnities of a thanksgiving day leave such impressions on ministers and people, as that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty afterward; then they are indeed acceptable to God and turn to a good account. So it was here.

1. The ministers were more careful than they had been of their work; they respect the people paid them upon this occasion, encouraged them to diligence and watchfulness, *ver. 45.* The singers kept the ward of their God, attending in due time to the duty of their office; the porters too, they kept the ward of the purification, i. e. they took care to preserve the purity of the temple, by denying admission to those that were ceremonially unclean. When the joy of the Lord thus engageth us to our duty, and enlargeth us in it; it is then an earnest of that joy, which in concurrence with the perfection of holiness will be our everlasting bliss.

2. The people were more careful than they had been of the maintenance of their ministers. The people at the dedication of the wall, among other things which they made matter of their joy, rejoiced for the priests, and for the

the Levites that waited, ver. 44. They had a great deal of comfort in their ministers, and were glad of them; when they observed how diligently they waited, and what pains they took in their work, they rejoiced in them. Note, The surest way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is to wait on their ministry, Rom. xii. 7. to be humble and industrious, and to mind their business; when these did so, the people thought nothing too much to do for them, to encourage them. The law had provided them *their portions*, ver. 44. But what the better were they for that provision, if what the law appointed them either was not duly collected, or not justly paid them.

Now, 1. Care is here taken for the collecting of their dues; they were modest and would rather lose their right, than call for it themselves; the people were many of them careless, and would not bring it unless they were called upon; and therefore *some were appointed*, whose office it should be to gather into the treasuries out of the fields of the cities, the portions of the law for the priests and Levites, ver. 44. that their portion might not be lost for want of being demanded. This is a piece of good service both to ministers and people, that the one may not come short of their maintenance, nor the other of their duty.

2. Care is taken, that being gathered in, it might be duly paid out, ver. 47. They gave the singers and porters their daily portion, over and above what was due to them as Levites; for we may suppose when David and Solomon appointed them their work (ver. 45, 46.) above what was required from them as Levites, they settled a fund for their further encouragement. Let those that labour more abundantly in the word and doctrine, be counted worthy of this double honour. As for the other Levites, the tithes, here called the holy things, were duly set apart for them, out of which they paid the priests the tithe according to the law. Both are said to be sanctified; when what is contributed either voluntarily or by law, for the support of religion and the maintenance of the ministry, is given with an eye to God and his honour, it is sanctified, and shall be accepted of him accordingly, and it will cause the blessing to rest on the house, and all that is in it, Ezek. xlv. 30.

C H A P. XIII.

Nehemiah having finished what he undertook for the fencing and filling of the holy city, returned to the king his master, who could not long be without him, as appears, ver. 6. But after some time got leave to come back again to Jerusalem to redress grievances, and purge out some corruptions which had crept in in his absence; and very active he was in reforming several abuses, which here we have an account of. (1.) He turned out from Israel the mixed multitude, the Moabites and the Ammonites especially, ver. 1—3. And Tobiah, with a particular indignation, he expelled out of the lodgings he had got in the court of the temple, ver. 4—9. (2.) He secured the maintenance of the priests and Levites to them more firmly than it had been, ver. 10—14. (3.) He restrained the profanation of the sabbath day, and provided for the due sanctification of it, ver. 15—22. (4.) He checked the growing mischief of marrying strange wives, ver. 23—31.

1. **O**N that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite, and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; 2. Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3. Now it came to pass when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude. 4. ¶ And before this Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: 5. And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat-offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, (which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters) and the offerings of the priests. 6. But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon, came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: 7. And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. 8. And it grieved me sore, therefore I cast forth all the household-stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. 9. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers; and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat-offering, and the frankincense.

It was the honour of Israel, and the greatest preservation of their holiness, that they were a peculiar people, and were so to keep themselves, and not to mingle with the nations, nor suffer any of them to incorporate with them.

Now here we have,

1. The law to this purpose, which happened to be read on that day, in the audience of the people, ver. 1. on the day of the dedication of the wall, as it should seem, for with their prayers and praises they joined the reading of the word; and though it was long after that the other grievances here mentioned, were redressed by Nehemiah's power; yet this of the mixed multitude, might be redressed then by the peoples own act, for so it seems to be, ver. 3. Or perhaps it was on the anniversary commemoration of that day some years after, and therefore said to be on that day. They found a law that the Ammonites and Moabites should not be naturalized, should not settle among them, nor unite with them, ver. 1. And the reason given, is because they had been injurious and ill-natured to the Israel of God, ver. 2. had not shewed them common civility, but sought their ruin, though they not only did them no harm, but were expressly forbidden to do them any. This law we have with this reason, Deut. xxiii. 3, 4, 5.

2. The people's ready compliance with this law, ver. 3. See the benefit

of the public reading of the word of God, when it is duly attended to, it discovers to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shews us wherein we have erred. And then we profit by the discovery, when by it we are wrought upon to separate ourselves from all that evil to which we had addicted ourselves. They separated from Israel all the mixed multitude, which had of old been a snare to them, for the mixed multitude, *fill a hyssop*, Num. xi. 4. These inmates they expelled, as usurpers and dangerous.

3. The particular case of Tobiah, who was an Ammonite, and to whom, it is likely the historian had an eye in the recital of that law, ver. 1. and the reason of it, ver. 2. For he had the same enmity to Israel that his ancestors had, the spirit of an Ammonite, witness his indignation at Nehemiah, chap. ii. 10. and the opposition he had given to this undertaking, chap. iv. 7. Observe,

1. How basely Eliashib the chief priest took this Tobiah in, to be a lodger even in the courts of the temple. (1.) He was allied to Tobiah, ver. 4. by marriage first, and then by friendship: His grandson had married Sanballat's daughter, ver. 28. And it is likely some other of his family had married Tobiah's, and (would you think it?) the high-priest thought the alliance an honour to his family, and was mighty proud of it, though really it was his greatest disgrace, and what he had reason to be ashamed of. It was expressly provided by the law, that the high-priest should marry one of his own people, else he *profanes his seed among his people*, Lev. xxi. 14. And for Eliashib to contract an alliance with an Ammonite, a servant, (for so he is called,) and to value himself upon it, probably because he was a wit, and a beau, and cried up for a pretty gentleman, chap. vi. 19. was such a contempt of the crown of his consecration, as one would not wish should be told in Gath, or published in the streets of Askelon.

(2.) Being allied to him, he must be acquainted with him. Tobiah, being a man of business, has often occasion to be at Jerusalem, I doubt upon no good design. Eliashib is fond of his new kinsman, pleased with this company, and must have him as near him as he can; he has not a room for him stately enough in his own apartment, in the courts of the temple; therefore out of several little chambers, which had been used for store-chambers, by taking down the partitions, he contrived to make one great chamber, a state room for Tobiah, ver. 5. A wretched thing it was, (1.) That Tobiah the Ammonite should be entertained with respect in Israel, and have a magnificent reception. (2.) That the high-priest who should have taught the people the law, and set them a good example, should, contrary to the law, give him entertainment, and make use of the power he had as overseer of the chambers of the temple, for that purpose. (3.) That he should lodge him in the courts of God's house, as it were to confront God himself; this was next to setting up an idol there, as the wicked kings of old had done. An Ammonite must not come into the congregation, and shall one of the worst and vilest of the Ammonites be courted into the temple itself, and caressed there. (4.) That he should throw out the stores of the temple to make room for him, and so expose them to be lost, wasted, and embezzled, though they were the portion of the priests, merely to gratify Tobiah. Thus did he corrupt the covenant of Levi, as Malachi complained at this time, chap. ii. 8. Well might Nehemiah, add, ver. 7. *But all this time was not I at Jerusalem*: If he had been there, the high-priest durst not have done such a thing. The envious one that sows tares in God's field, know how to take an opportunity to do it when the servants sleep, or are absent, Matt. xiii. 25. The golden calf was made when Moses was in the mount.

2. How bravely Nehemiah, the chief governor, threw him out, and all that belonged to him, and restored the chambers to their proper use; when he came to Jerusalem, and was informed by the good people, who were troubled at it, what an intimacy was grown between their chief-priest, and their chief enemy, it grieved him sore, ver. 7, 8. that God's house should be so profaned, his enemies so caressed and trusted, and his cause betrayed by him that should be his protector and patron. Nothing grieves a good man a good magistrate more, than to see the ministers of God's house do any ill thing. Nehemiah has power, and he will use it for God. (1.) Tobiah shall out, he fears not disobliging him, fears not his resentments, or Eliashib's, nor excuseth himself from interposing in an affair that lay within the jurisdiction of the high-priest, but like one zealously affected in a good thing, expelled the intruder, by casting forth all his household-stuff: he did not seize it for his own use, but cast it out, that Tobiah, who it was probable was now absent, when he came again, might have no convenience for his reception there: Our Saviour thus cleansed the temple, that the house of prayer might not be a den of thieves. And thus they that would expel sin out of their hearts, those living temples, must throw out its household-stuff, and all the provision made for it: strip it, starve it, and take away all those things that are the food and fuel of lust, this is in effect to mortify it. (2.) The temple stores shall be brought in again, and the vessels of the house of God put in their places; but the chambers must first be sprinkled with the water of purification, and so cleansed, because they had been profaned. Thus when sin is cast out of the heart by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, and let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit for every good work.

10. ¶ And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers that did the work, were fled every one to his field. 11. Then contended I with the rulers: and said, Why is the house of God forsaken; And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. 12. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn, and the new wine, and the oil, unto the treasuries. 13. And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah, and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren. 14. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out the good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

Here is another grievance redressed by Nehemiah.

1. The Levites had been wronged. That was the grievance, their portions had not been given them, ver. 10. Perhaps Tobiah when he took possession of the store-chambers, seized the stores too, and by the connivance of Eliashib converted them to his own use. The complaint is not that they were not collected from the people, but that they were not given to the Levites, and the Levites were so modest as not to sue for them: For the Levites and singers were fled every one to his field. This comes in as a reason, either, (1.) Why their payments were withheld; the Levites were non-residents; when

when they should have been doing their work about the temple they were at their farms in the country, and therefore the people minded not to give them their maintenance. If ministers have not the encouragement they should have, let them consider, whether they themselves be not accessory to the contempt they are under, by the neglect of their business. Or rather, (2.) It is the reason why Nehemiah soon perceived that their dues had been denied them, because he missed them from their posts. Where are the fingers? saith Nehemiah: why do not they attend according to their office to praise God? Why, truly they are gone every one to his country-seat to get a livelihood for themselves and their families out of their grounds, for their profession would not maintain them. A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. The work is neglected, because the workmen are. It was not long since the payment of the salaries appointed for the fingers was put into a very good method, chap. xii. 47. and yet how soon did it fail, for want of being looked after.

2. Nehemiah laid the fault upon the rulers, who should have taken care that the Levites minded their business, and had all due encouragement therein. This is required from Christian magistrates, that they use their power to oblige ministers to do their duty, and people to do theirs. Nehemiah began with the rulers, and called them to an account, *Why is the house of God forsaken?* ver. 11. Why are the Levites starved out of it? Why did not you take notice of this and prevent it? The people forsook the Levites, which was expressly forbidden, *Deut. xii. 19.—xiv. 27.* And then the Levites forsook their post in the house of God. Both ministers and people that forsake religion and the services of it, and magistrates too, who do not what they can to keep them to it, will have a great deal to answer for.

3. He delayed not to bring the dispersed Levites to *their places* again, and set them in *their stations*, as the word is, ver. 11. A Levite in his field (*clericus in foro*) is out of his station; God's house is his place, and there let him be found. Many that are careless would do much better than they do, if they were but called upon. *Say to Archippus, Take heed to thy ministry.*

4. He obliged the people to bring in their tithes, ver. 12. His zeal provoked them, and when they saw the Levites at their work, they could not for shame withhold their wages any longer, but honestly and cheerfully brought it in. The better church-work is done, the better will church dues be paid.

5. He provided that just and prompt payment should be made of the Levites stipends; commissioners were appointed to see to this, ver. 13. and they were such as *were accounted faithful*, i. e. had approved themselves so in other trusts committed to them, and so had *purchased to themselves this good degree*, 1 Tim. iii. 13. Let men be tried first and then trusted; tried in the less and then trusted with more. Their office was to receive and pay, to distribute to their brethren in due season and in due proportions.

6. Having no recompence (it is a question whether he had thanks) from those to whom he did these good turns, he looks up to God as his paymaster, ver. 14. *Remember me, O my God concerning this.* Nehemiah was a man much in pious ejaculations, on every occasion he looked up to God, and committed himself and his affairs to him. (1.) He here reflects with comfort and much satisfaction upon what he had done for the house of God and the offices thereof; it pleased him to think that he had been any way instrumental to revive and support religion in his country, and to reform what was amiss. What kindness any shew to God's ministers, thus shall it be returned into their own bosoms, in the secret joy they shall have there, not only in having done well, but in having done good, good to many, good to souls. (2.) He here refers himself to God to consider him for it, not in pride or as boasting of what he had done, much less depending upon it as his righteousness, or as if he thought he had made God a debtor to him, but in a humble appeal to him concerning his integrity and honest intention in what he had done; and a believing expectation, that he would not be unrighteous to *forget his work and labour of love*, Heb. vi. 10. Observe how modest he is in his requests; he only prays, *remember me*, not reward me; *wipe not out my good deeds*, not publish them, record them. Yet he was rewarded, and his good deeds recorded, for God doth more than we are able to ask. Note *Deeds done for the houses of God and the offices of it*, for the support of religion, and the encouragement of it, are good deeds; there is both righteousness and godliness in them, and God will certainly remember them, and not wipe them out; they shall in no wise lose their reward.

15. ¶ In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine-presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath-day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. 16. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day? 18. Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel, by profaning the sabbath. 19. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gate should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants sat I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath-day. 20. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware, lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. 21. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. 22. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath-day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Here is another instance of that blessed reformation Nehemiah was active in; he revived sabbath-sanctification, and maintains the authority of the No. LXVIII*.

fourth commandment; and a very good deed this was for the house of God and the offices thereof; for where holy time is over-looked and made nothing of, it is not strange if all holy duties be neglected. Herein,

1. A remonstrance of the abuse. The law of the sabbath was very strict, and much insisted on, and with good reason, for religion is never in the throne, while sabbaths are trodden under foot. But Nehemiah discovered even in Judah, among those to whom sabbaths were given for a sign, this law wretchedly violated. His own eyes were his informers, and magistrates that are in care to discharge their duty aright, will as much as may be *see with their own eyes*, and accomplish a diligent search to find out that which is evil. To his great grief it appeared that there was a general profanation of the sabbath, that holy day, even in Jerusalem, that holy city, which was so lately dedicated to God. (1.) The husbandmen trod their wine-presses, and brought home their corn on that day, ver. 15. though there was an express command, that *in earing-time, and in harvest-time, they should rest* on the sabbaths, *Exod. xxxiv. 21.* because then they might be tempted to take a greater liberty, and to fancy that God would indulge them in it. (2.) The carriers load their asses with all manner of burdens, and made no scruple of it, though there was a particular proviso in the law for the cattle resting, *Deut. v. 14.* and that they should *bear no burden on the sabbath-day*, Jer. xvi. 21. (3.) The hawkers and pedlars and petty chapmen, that were men of Tyre, that famous trading city, *sold all manner of ware* on the sabbath-day, ver. 16. and the children of Judah and Jerusalem had so little grace as to buy of them, and so encourage them, making our Father's day a day of merchandise, contrary to the law of the fourth commandment, which forbids the *doing any manner of work*. No wonder there was a general decay of religion and corruption of manners among this people, when they *forsook the sanctuary*, and *profaned the sabbath*.

2. The reformation of it. They that are jealous for the honour of God, cannot bear to see his sabbath profaned. Observe in what method this good man proceeded in his zeal for the sabbath.

1. He testified against them which profaned it, ver. 15. and again, ver. 21. He not only expressed his own dislike of it, but endeavoured to convince them that it was a great sin, and shewed them the testimony of the word of God against it. He would not punish it, till he had laid open the evil of it.

2. He reasoned with the rulers concerning it, took the nobles of Judah to task, and contended with them, ver. 17. The greatest of men are not too big to be told of their faults by those whose proper office it is; nay, great men should be, as here, contended with in the first place, because of the influence they have upon others. (1.) He charged them with it, *ye do it*. They did not carry corn, nor sell fish, but, (1.) They connived at them that did, and did not use their powers to restrain them, and so made themselves guilty, as those magistrates do, who bear the sword in vain. (2.) They set an ill example in other things; if the nobles allowed themselves in sports and recreations, in idle visits and idle talk on the sabbath-day, the men of business both in city and country would profane it by their worldly employments, as more justifiable. We must be responsible for the sins which others commit by our example. (2.) He charged it upon them as an evil thing, for so it is, proceeding from a great contempt of God and our own souls. (3.) He reasons the case with them, ver. 18. and shews them that sabbath-breaking was one of the sins for which God had brought judgments upon them, and if they did not take warning, but return to the same sins again, they had reason to expect farther judgments: *ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath*. Thus Ezra concluded, *If we again break thy commandments, will not thou be angry with us till thou hast consumed us?* Ezra ix. 14.

3. He took care to prevent the profanation of the sabbath, as one that aimed only at reformation; if he could reform them, he would not punish them, and if he should punish them, it was but that he might reform them. This is an example to magistrates to be heirs of restraint, and prudently to use the bit and bridle, that there be no occasion for the lash.

(1.) He ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be kept shut from the evening before the sabbath to the morning after, and set his own servants (whose care, courage and honesty he could confide in) to watch them, that no burdens should be brought in on the sabbath-day, nor late the night before, nor early the morning after, lest sabbath time should be intruded upon, ver. 19. Those that came in to worship in the courts of the temple, no doubt were admitted to pass and repass, but none that came to sell goods, they were forced to lodge without the city, ver. 20. where no doubt they wished the sabbath were gone, that they might sell corn.

(2.) He threatened those that came with goods to the gates, who pressed hard for entrance, telling them if they came again he would certainly lay them by the heels, ver. 21. And this frightened them from coming any more. Note, If reformers will but put on resolution, more may be done towards the breaking of ill customs than they can imagine. Vice connived at is indeed a daring thing, and will bid defiance to counsel and reproof; but it may be made a sneaking thing, and will be so, when magistrates make themselves a terror to it. *The king that sits on the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes.*

(3.) He charged the Levites to take care about the due sanctifying of the sabbath, that they should cleanse themselves in the first place, and so give a good example to the people, and that they should some of them come and keep the gates, ver. 22. Because he and his servants must shortly return to court, he would leave this charge with some that might abide by it, that not only when he was present, but in his absence the sabbath might be sanctified. Then there is likely to be a reformation in this and other instances, when magistrates and ministers join their forces. The courage, zeal and prudence of Nehemiah in this matter, is here recorded for our imitation; and we have reason to think the cure he wrought was lasting; for in our Saviour's time, we find the Jews in the other extreme, over scrupulous in the ceremonial part of the sabbath sanctification.

4. He concludes this passage with a prayer, ver. 22. In which observe, (1.) The petitions. *Remember me*, as the thief on the cross, *Lord, remember me*, that is enough; God's thoughts towards us are very precious, *Psal. xl. 5.* and *spare me*; so far is he from thinking that what he had done did properly merit a reward in strict justice, that he cries earnestly to God to spare him, as Jeremiah, chap. xv. 15. *take me not away in thy long-suffering*, chap. x. 24. *correct me not in anger*, and chap. xvii. 17. *be not a terror to me*. Note, The best saints, even when they do the best actions, stand in need of sparing mercy, for there is not a just man that doeth good and sinneth not. (2.) The plea according to the greatness (or multitude) of thy mercies. Note, God's mercy is what we must depend upon, and not any merit of our own, when we appear before God.

23. ¶ In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon and of Moab: 24. And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews language, but according to the language of each people. 25. And I contended

with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. 26. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin. 27. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God, in marrying strange wives? 28. And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high-priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Honorite: therefore I chased him from me. 29. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. 30. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business: 31. And for the wood-offering, at times appointed, and for the first-fruits, Remember me, O my God, for good.

We have here one instance more of Nehemiah's pious zeal for the purifying of his countrymen, a peculiar people to God, that was the thing he aimed at in the use of his power, not the enriching of himself.

1. See here how they had corrupted themselves by marrying strange wives. This was complained of in Ezra's time, and much done towards a reformation, *Ezra ix. and x.* But when the unclean spirit is cast out, if a watchful eye be not kept upon him, he will re-enter, so he did here; though in Ezra's time they that had married strange wives were forced to put them away, which could not but occasion trouble and confusion in families, yet others would not take warning, *nititur in vetitum*. Nehemiah, like a good governor, inquired into the state of the families of those that were under his charge that he might reform what was amiss in them, and so *heal the streams, by healing the springs*.

(1.) He enquired whence they had their wives, and found that many of the Jews had married wives of *Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab*, ver. 23. either because they were fond of what was far-fetched, or because they hoped by these alliances to strengthen and enrich themselves. See how God by the prophet reproves this, *Mal. ii. 11. Judah has dealt treacherously, and broken covenant with God, the covenant made in Ezra's time, with reference to this very thing; he has profaned the holiness of the Lord by marrying the daughter that is the worshipper of a strange god.*

(2.) He talked with the children, and found they were children of strangers, for their speech betrayed them. The children were bred up with their mothers and learned of them and their nurses and servants to speak, so that they could not speak the Jews language, either not at all, or not readily, or not purely; but half in the speech of Ashdod, or Ammon, or Moab, according as the country was which the mother was a native of. Observe (1.) Children in their childhood learn much of their mothers. *Partus sequitur ventrem*. (2.) If either side be bad, the corrupt nature will incline the children to take after that, which is a good reason why Christians should not be unequally yoked. (3.) In the education of children, great care should be taken about the government of their tongues. That they learn not the language of Ashdod, any impious or impure talk, any corrupt communication.

2. See what course Nehemiah took to purge out this corruption, when he discovered how much it had prevailed.

1. He shewed them the evil of it, and the obligation he lay under to witness against it. He did not seek an occasion against them, but this was an iniquity to be punished by the judge, and which he must by no means connive at, ver. 27. *shall we hearken to you, who endeavour to palliate and excuse it?* No, it is an evil, a great evil, it is a *transgression against our God to marry strange wives*, and we must do our utmost to put a stop to it; you beg that they may not be divorced from you, but we cannot hearken to you, for there is no other remedy to clear us from the guilt, and prevent the infection. (1.) He quotes a precept to prove that it was in itself a great sin, and makes them swear to that precept, *ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, &c.* which is taken from *Deut. vii. 3*. When we would reclaim

people from sin, we must shew them the sinfulness of it in the glass of the commandment. (2.) He quotes a precedent to shew the pernicious consequences of it, which makes it necessary to be animadverted upon by the government, ver. 26. *Did not Solomon, king of Israel sin by these things?* The falls of great and good men are therefore recorded, that we may take warning by them, to shun the temptations which they were overcome by. Solomon was famous for wisdom, there was no king like him for it, yet when he married strange wives, his wisdom could not secure him from the snares, nay, it departed from him, and he did very foolishly. He was beloved of God, but that threw him out of God's favour, and went near quite to extinguish the holy fire of grace in his soul: he was king over all Israel, but that lost him ten of his twelve tribes. You plead that you can marry strange wives, and yet retain the purity of Israelites; but Solomon himself could not; even *him did outlandish women cause to sin*. Therefore let him that *thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall*, when he runs upon such a precipice.

2. He shewed himself highly displeased at it, that he might awaken them to a due sense of the evil of it. He contended with them, ver. 25. they offered to justify themselves in what they did; but he shewed them how frivolous their excuses were, and argued it warmly with them. When he had silenced them, he *cursed them*, i. e. he denounced the judgments of God against them, and shewed them what their sin deserved: And then picked out some of them who were more obstinate than the rest, and fit to be made examples, and *smote them*, i. e. ordered them to be beaten by the proper officers according to the law, *Deut. xxv. 2, 3*. To which he added this farther mark of infamy, he *plucked off their hair*, or cut or shaved it off; for it may be so understood. Perhaps they had prided themselves in their hair, and therefore he took it off to deform and humble them, and put them to shame; it was in effect to stigmatize them, at least for a time. Ezra, in this case, had plucked off his own hair, in holy sorrow for the sin; Nehemiah plucked off their hair in a holy indignation at the sinners. See the different tempers of wife, and good, and useful men, and the divers graces, as well as divers gifts, of the same Spirit.

3. He obliged them not to take any more such wives, and separated those whom they had taken. He *cleansed them from all strangers*, both men and women, ver. 30. and made them promise with an oath that they would never do so again, ver. 25. Thus did he try all ways and means to put a stop to this mischief, and to prevent another relapse into this disease.

4. He took particular care of the priests families, that they might not lie under this stain, this guilt. He found upon enquiry, that a branch of the high-priest's own family, one of his grandsons had married a daughter of Sanballat, that notorious enemy of the Jews, (*chap. ii. 10.—iv. 1.*) and so had in effect twisted interests with the Samaritans, ver. 28. How little love had that man either to God or his country, who could make himself in duty and interest, a friend to him that was a sworn enemy to both. It seems this young priest would not put away his wife, and therefore Nehemiah *chased him from him*, deprived him, degraded him, and made him for ever incapable of the priesthood. Josephus saith, this expelled priest was Manasseh, and that when Nehemiah drove him away, he went to his father-in-law Sanballat, who built him a temple upon mount Gerizim, like that at Jerusalem, and promised him he should be high-priest in it, and then was laid the foundation of the Samaritans pretensions, which continued warm to our Saviour's time, *John iv. 20. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain*. When Nehemiah had thus expelled one that had forfeited the honour of the priesthood, he again posed the priests and Levites, *every one in his business*, ver. 30. It was no loss to them to part with one that was the scandal of their coat, the work would be done better without him. When Judas was gone out, Christ said, *Now is the son of man glorified*. *John xiii. 30, 31.*

Lastly, Here is Nehemiah's prayers on this occasion.

1. He prays, *Remember them, O my God*, ver. 29. Lord, convince and convert them, put them in mind of what they should be and do, that they may come to themselves. Or, remember them to reckon with them for it; remember it against them. If we take it so this prayer is a prophecy, that God would remember it against them. They that defile the priesthood, despise God and shall be lightly esteemed. Perhaps they were too many and too great for him to deal with, Lord, (saith he) deal with them, take the work into thine own hands.

2. He prays, *Remember me, O my God*, ver. 31. The best services done to the public have sometimes been forgotten by those for whom they were done, *Ecc. ix. 15.* therefore Nehemiah refers himself to God, to recompense him, takes him for his paymaster, and then doubts not but he shall be well paid. This may well be the summary of our petitions, we need no more to make us happy but this. *Remember me, O my God, for good.*



AN
E X P O S I T I O N,
WITH
PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,
Of the BOOK of
ESTHER.

How the providence of God watched over the Jews that were returned out of captivity to their own land, and what great and kind things were done for them, we read in the two foregoing books; but there were many that staid behind, having not zeal enough for God's house, and the holy land and city, to carry them through the difficulties of a removal thither: these one would think should have been excluded the special protection of providence, as unworthy the name of Israelites: but our God deals not with us according to our folly and weakness. We find in this book, that even those Jews which were scattered in the provinces of the heathen, were taken care of, as well as those that were gathered in the land of Judea, and were wonderfully preserved, when doomed to destruction and appointed as sheep for the slaughter. Who drew up this story, is uncertain; Mordecai was as able as any man to relate, on his own knowledge, the several passages of it, *quorum pars magna fuit*; and that he wrote such an account of them, as was necessary to inform his people of the grounds of their observing the feast of Purim, we are told, *chap. ix. 20, Mordecai wrote these things*, and sent them inclosed in letters to all the Jews; and therefore we have reason to think he was the penman of the whole book. It is the narrative of a plot laid against the Jews to cut them all off, and wonderfully disappointed by a concurrence of providences: The most compendious exposition of it will be to read it deliberately altogether at one sitting, for the latter events expound the former, and shew what providence intended in them. The name of God is not found in this book; but the apocryphal addition to it (which is not in the Hebrew, nor was ever received by the Jews into the canon,) containing six chapters, begin thus, *Then Mordecai said, God hath done these things*. But though the name of God be not in it the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of his people's deliverance. The particulars are not only surprising and very entertaining, but edifying and very encouraging to the faith and hope of God's people, in the most difficult and dangerous times; we cannot now expect such miracles to be wrought for us, as were for Israel when they were brought out of Egypt, but we may expect that in such ways as God here took to defeat Haman's plot, he will still protect his people. We are told, (1.) How Esther came to be queen, and Mordecai to be great at court, who were to be the instruments of the intended deliverance, *chap. i. and ii.* (2.) Upon what provocation and by what arts Haman the Amalekite obtained an order for the destruction of all the Jews, *chap. iii.* (3.) The great distress the Jews and their patriots especially were in thereupon, *chap. iv.* (4.) The defeating of Haman's particular plot against Mordecai's life, *chap. v. vi. and vii.* (5.) The defeating of his general plot against the Jews, *chap. viii.* (6.) The care that was taken to perpetuate the remembrance of this, *chap. ix. and x.* The whole story confirms the Psalmist's observation, *Psal. xxxvii. 12, 13. The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him, he sees that his day is coming.*

C H A P. I.

Several things in this chapter itself are very instructive and of use; but the design of recording the story of it is to shew how way was made for Esther to the crown, in order to her being instrumental to defeat Haman's plot, and this, long before the plot was laid, that we may observe and admire the foresight and vast reaches of providence. Known unto God are all his works before-hand. (1.) Ahasuerus the king, in his height, feasts all his great men, *ver. 1—9.* (2.) In his heat he divorceth his queen, because she would not come to him when he sent for her, *ver. 10—22.* And this shews how God serves his own purposes, even by the sins and follies of men, which he would not permit, if he knew not how to bring good out of them.

1. **N**OW it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:) 2. That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, 3. In the third year of his reign he made a feast unto all his princes, and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him. 4. When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, many days, even an hundred and fourscore days. 5. And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6. Where were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen, and purple, to silver rings, and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble. 7. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being divers one from another) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. 8. And the drinking was according to the law: none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. 9. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

Which of the kings of Persia this Ahasuerus was, the learned are not agreed; Mordecai is said to have been one of those that were carried captive from Jerusalem, *chap. ii. 6.* and by that it should seem it was one of

the first kings of that empire. Dr. Lightfoot thinks it was that Artaxerxes who hindered the building of the temple, who is called also Ahasuerus, *Ezra iv. 5, 7.* after his great-grandfather of the Medes, *Dan. ix. 1.* We have here an account,

1. Of the vast extent of his dominion. In the time of Darius and Cyrus, there were but one hundred and twenty provinces, *Dan. vi. 1.* Now here were one hundred twenty-seven, from India to Ethiopia, *ver. 1.* An overgrown kingdom, which in time would sink with its own weight, and, as usual, would lose its provinces as fast as it got them. If such vast power be put into a bad hand, it is able to do so much the more mischief, but if into a good hand, it is able to do so much the more good. Christ's kingdom is, or shall be, far larger than this, when the kingdoms of the world shall all become his, and it shall be everlasting.

2. Of the great pomp and magnificence of his court. When he found himself fixed and warmed in his throne, the pride of his heart rising with the grandeur of his kingdom, he made a most extravagant feast, wherein he put himself to a vast expence and trouble, only to shew the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty, *ver. 4.* This was vain glory, an affectation of pomp to no purpose at all; for none questioned the riches of his kingdom, nor offered to vie with him for honour. If he had shewed the riches of his kingdom, and the honour of his majesty, as some of his successors did, in contributing largely towards the building of the temple, and the maintaining of the temple-service, (*Ezra xi. 8.—vii. 22.*) it would have turned to a much better account. Two feasts Ahasuerus made: (1.) One for his nobles and princes, which lasted one hundred and eighty days, *ver. 3, 4.* Not that he feasted the same persons every day for all that time, but perhaps the nobles and princes of one province one day, of another province another day, while thus he and his constant attendants fared sumptuously every day. The Chaldee paraphrast (who is very bold in his additions to the story of this book) saith, there had been a rebellion among his subjects, and this feast was kept for joy of the quashing of it. (2.) Another was made for all the people, both great and small, which lasted seven days; some one day, and some another; and because no house would hold them, they were entertained in the court of the garden, *ver. 5.* The hangings with which the several apartments were divided, or the tents which were there pitched for the company, were very fine and rich, so were the beds or benches on which they sat, and the pavement under their feet, *ver. 6.* Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness, and the enjoyment of one's self and a friend, than this banquet of wine, with all the noise and tumult that must needs attend it.

3. Of the good order which in some respects was kept there notwithstanding. We do not find this like Belsazzar's feast, in which dunghill-gods were praised, and the vessels of the sanctuary profaned, *Dan. v. 3, 4.* Yet the Chaldee paraphrast saith, the vessels of the sanctuary were used in this feast to the great grief of the pious Jews. It was not like Herod's feast, which reserved a prophet's head for the last dish.

But two things more we may gather from the account here given of this feast, which are laudable.

1. That there was no forcing of healths, nor urging them. That the drinking was according to the law, probably some law lately made, none did compel, no not by a continual proposing it, (as Josephus explains it) they did not send the glass about, but every man drank as he pleased, *ver. 8.* so that if there were any that drank to excess, it was their own fault, but few would when the king's order put an honour upon sobriety. This caution of a heathen prince, even then when he would shew his generosity, may shame many who are called Christians, that think they do not sufficiently shew

shew their good housekeeping, nor bid their friends welcome, unless they make them drunk, and under pretence of sending the health round, send the sin round, and death with it. There is a woe to them that do so, let them read it and tremble, *Hab. ii. 15, 16.* It is robbing men of their reason, their richest jewel, and making them fools, the greatest wrong that can be.

2. That there was no mixed dancing, for the gentlemen and ladies were entertained asunder, not as in Belshazzar's feast, whose wives and concubines drank with him, *Dan. v. 2.* or Herod's, whose daughter danced before him. Vashti feasted the women in her own apartment; not openly in the court of the garden, but in the royal house, *ver. 9.* Thus while the king shewed the honour of his majesty, she and her ladies shewed the honour of their modesty, which is truly the majesty of the fair sex.

10. ¶ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king. 11. To bring Vashti the queen before the king, with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. 12. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: and therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. 13. ¶ Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner towards all, that knew law and judgment: 14. And the next unto him was Carshena, She-thar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) 15. What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus, by the chamberlains? 16. And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. 17. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. 18. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. 19. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. 20. And when the king's decree which he shall make, shall be published throughout all his empire (for it is great) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. 21. And the saying pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan: 22. For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

We have here a damp to all the mirth of Ahasuerus's feast, it ended in heaviness, not as Job's children's feast by a wind from the wilderness, not as Belshazzar's by a hand-writing on the wall, but by his own folly. An unhappy falling-out there was at the end of the feast, between the king and queen, which broke off the solemnity abruptly, and sent the guests away silent and ashamed.

1. It was certainly the king's weakness to send for Vashti into his presence when he was drunk and in company with abundance of gentlemen, many of them it is likely, in the same condition. When his heart was merry with wine, nothing would serve him, but Vashti must come well dressed as she was, with the crown on her head, that the princes and people might see what a pretty woman she was, *ver. 10, 11.* Hereby (1.) He dishonoured himself as a husband, who ought to protect, but by no means to expose the modesty of his wife, to be to her a covering of the eyes, (*Gen. xx. 16.*) not to uncover them. (2.) He diminished himself as a king, in commanding that from his wife, which he might refuse, much to the honour of her virtue. It was against the custom of the Persians for the women to appear in public, and he put a great hardship upon her, when he did not court but command her to do so uncouth a thing, and make her a shew. If he had not been put out of the possession of himself by drinking to excess, he would not have done such a thing, but have been angry at any one that should have mentioned it. When the wine is in, the wit is out, and men's reason departs from them.

2. However, perhaps it was not her wisdom to deny him, *ver. 12.* she refused to come, though he sent his command by seven honourable messengers, and publicly, and Josephus saith sent again and again, yet she persisted in her denial. Had she come while it was evident she did it in pure obedience, it would have been no reflection upon her modesty, nor of ill example. The thing was not in itself sinful, and therefore to obey had been more her honour than to be so precise. Perhaps she refused in a haughty manner, and then it was certainly evil; she scorned to come at the king's commandment. What a bulk was this to him! while he was shewing the glory of his kingdom, he shewed the reproach of his family, that he had a wife

that would do as she pleased. Strifes between yoke-fellows are bad enough at any time, but before company they are very scandalous, and occasion blushing and uneasiness.

3. The king thereupon grew outrageous. He that had rule over one hundred twenty-seven provinces, had no rule over his own spirit, but his anger burned in him, *ver. 12.* He had consulted his own comfort and credit more, if he had stifled his resentments, had passed by the affront his wife gave him, and turned it off with a jest.

4. Though he was very angry, he would not do any thing in this matter, till he advised with his privy-counsellors; as he had seven chamberlains to execute his orders, who are named, *ver. 10.* so he had seven counsellors to direct his orders. The great power a man hath, the greater need he has of advice, that he may not abuse his power. Of these counsellors it is said, that they were learned men, for they knew law and judgment; that they were wise men, for they knew the times; and that the king put great confidence in them and honour upon them, for they saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom, *ver. 13, 14.* In multitude of such counsellors there is safety. Now here is,

1. The question proposed to this cabinet-council; *ver. 15.* What shall we do to the queen Vashti, according to law? Observe. (1.) Though it was the queen that was guilty, the law must have its course. (2.) Though the king was very angry, yet he would do nothing but what he was advised to according to law.

2. The proposal which Memucan made, that Vashti should be divorced for her disobedience. Some suggest that he gave this severe advice, and the rest agreed to it, because they knew it would please the king, would gratify both his passion now, and his appetite afterwards. But Josephus saith, that, on the contrary, he had a mighty affection for Vashti, and would not have put her away for this offence, if he could legally have passed it by. And then we must suppose Memucan in his advice, to have a sincere regard to justice and the public good.

(1.) He shews what would be the ill consequence of the queen's disobedience to her husband, if it were passed by and not animadverted upon, that it would embolden other wives both to disobey their husband and to domineer over them. Had this unhappy falling out between the king and his wife, wherein she was conqueror, been private, the error had remained with themselves, and the quarrel might have been made away privately between themselves, but it happened to be public, and perhaps the ladies that were now feasting with the queen having shewed themselves pleased with her refusal, her bad example would be likely to have had a bad influence upon all the families of the kingdom; if the queen must have her humour, and the king must submit to it, (since the houses of private persons commonly take their measures from the courts of princes) the wives would be haughty and imperious, and would scorn to obey their husbands, and the poor despised husbands might fret at it, but could not help themselves, for the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping, *Prov. xix. 13.—xxviii. 15.* and see *Prov. xxi. 9.—xxv. 24.* When wives despise their husbands, whom they ought to reverence, *Eph. v. 33.* and contend for dominion over those to whom they ought to be in subjection, 1 *Pet. iii. 1.* there cannot but be continual guilt and grief, confusion and every evil work. And great ones must take heed of letting copies of this kind, *ver. 16, 17, 18.*

(2.) He shews what would be the good consequence of a decree against Vashti, that she should be divorced. We may suppose before they proceeded to this extremity, they sent to Vashti to know if she would yet submit, cry *peccavi*, and ask the king's pardon, which if she had done, the mischief of her example would have been effectually prevented, and process should have been staid; but it is likely she continued obstinate, and insisted upon it as her prerogative to do as she pleased, whether it pleased the king or no; and therefore they gave this judgment against her, that she come no more before the king, and this judgment so ratified, as never to be reversed, *ver. 19.*

The consequence of this it was hoped would be, that the wives would give their husbands honour, even the wives of the great, notwithstanding their own greatness, and the wives of the small, notwithstanding the husband's meanness, *ver. 20.* And thus every man would bear rule in his own house, as he ought to do, and the wives being subject, the children and servants would be so too. It is the interest of states and kingdoms, to provide that good order be kept in private families.

3. The edict that passed according to this proposal, signifying that the queen was divorced for contumacy according to the law, and that if other wives were in like manner undutiful to their husbands, they must expect to be in like manner disgraced, *ver. 21, 22.* were they better than the queen? Whether it was the passion or the policy of the king that was served by this edict, God's providence served its own purpose by it, which was to make way for Esther to the crown.

C H A P. II.

Two things are here recorded in this chapter, which were working towards the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's conspiracy, (1.) The advance of Esther to be queen instead of Vashti. Many others were candidates for the honour, *ver. 1—4.* But Esther an orphan, a captive Jew, *ver. 5—7.* recommended herself to the king's chamberlain first, *ver. 8—11.* and then to the king, *ver. 12—17.* who made her queen, *ver. 18—20.* (2.) The good service that Mordecai did to the king, in discovering in plot against his life, *ver. 21—23.*

1. AFTER these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. 2. Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king. 3. And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hega the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women, and let their things for purification be given them: 4. And let the maiden which pleaseth the king, be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king, and he did so. 5. ¶ Now in Shushan the palace, there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shemai, the son of Kish, a Benjamite: 6. Who had been carried away from Jerusalem, with the captivity which had been carried away

away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7. And he brought up Hadassah (that is Esther) his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful, whom Mordecai (when her father and mother was dead) took for his own daughter. 8. ¶ So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai keeper of the women. 9. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him, and he speedily gave her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens which were meet to be given her out of the king's house, and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women. 10. Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it. 11. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. 12. ¶ Now when every maid's turn was come, to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women.) 13. Then thus came every maiden unto the king: whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women, unto the king's house. 14. In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women to the custody of Shashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name. 15. ¶ Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai (who had taken her for his daughter) was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing, but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women appointed: and Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. 16. So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus in his house royal, in the tenth month (which is in the month Tebeth) in the seventh year of his reign. 17. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18. Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast, and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts according to the state of the king. 19. And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. 20. Esther had not yet shewed her kindred, nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

How God put down one that was high and mighty from her seat, we read in the chapter before, and are now to be told how he exalted one of low degree, as the virgin Mary observes in her song *Luke i. 52.* and Hannah before her, *Sam. ii. 4-8.* Vashti being humbled for her height, Esther is advanced for her humility. Observe,

1. The extravagant course that was taken to please the king with another wife instead of Vashti. Josephus saith, when his anger was over, he was exceedingly grieved that the matter was carried so far, and would have been reconciled to Vashti, but that by the constitution of the government, the judgment was irrevocable; therefore to make him forget her, they contrived how to entertain him first with a great variety of concubines, and then to fix him to the most agreeable of them for a wife instead of Vashti. The marriages of princes are commonly made by policy and interest, for the enlarging of their dominions, and the strengthening of their alliances; but this must be made partly by the agreeableness of the person to the king's fancy, whether she were rich or poor, noble or ignoble. What ado was made here to humour the king; as if his power and wealth were given him for no other end, but that he might have all the delights of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable and exquisitely refined, though at the best they are but dross and dregs in comparison with divine and spiritual pleasures. (1.) All the provinces of this kingdom must be searched for fair young virgins, and officers appointed to choose them, *ver. 3.* (2.) A house (a seraglio) was prepared on purpose for them, and a person appointed to have the charge of them, to see that they were well provided for. (3.) No less than twelve months were allowed for their purification, some of them at least, who were brought out of the country, that they might be very clean and perfumed, *ver. 12.* Even those who were the master-pieces of nature, must yet have all this help from art, to recommend them to a vain and carnal mind. (4.) After the king had once taken them to his bed, they were made recluses ever after, except the king pleased at any time to send for them, *ver. 14.* they were looked upon as secondary wives, were maintained by the king accordingly, and might not marry. We may see by this instance, to what absurd practices those came, who were destitute of divine revelation, and to punish them for their idolatry were given

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up to vile affections; having broke through that law of creation which resulted from God's making man, they broke through another law, which was founded upon his making one man and one woman. And see what need there was of the gospel of Christ to purify men from the lusts of the flesh, and to reduce them to their original institution. Those that have learned Christ, we think it a shame even to speak of such things as these which were done of them, not only in secret, but avowedly, *Eph. v. 12.*

2. The over-ruling providence of God bringing Esther to be queen by this means. Had she been first recommended to Ahasuerus for a wife, he would have rejected the motion with disdain. But when she comes in her turn after several others, and it was found, that though many of them were ingenious and discreet, graceful and agreeable, yet Esther excelled them all. Thus way was made for her, even by her rivals, into the king's affections, and the honours consequent thereupon. And as Bishop Patrick saith, those who suggest that she committed a great sin to come at this dignity, do not consider the customs of those times and countries. Every one that the king took to his bed, was married to him, and was his wife of a lower rank, as Hagar was Abraham's, so that if Esther had not been made queen, the sons of Jacob need not say, that he dealt with their sister as with an harlot. Concerning Esther, we must observe,

1. Her original character. (1.) She was one of the children of the captivity: a Jewess, and a sharer with her people in their bondage, Daniel and his fellows were advanced in the land where they were captives; for they were of those whom God sent thither for their good, *Jer. xxiv. 5.* (2.) She was an orphan; her father and mother were both dead, *ver. 7.* but when they had forsaken her, then the Lord took her up, *Psal. xxvii. 10.* When those whose unhappiness it is to be thus deprived of their parents in their childhood, yet afterwards come to be eminently pious and prosperous, we ought to take notice of it to the glory of that God, and his grace and providence, who has taken it among the titles of his honour to be a father of the fatherless. (3.) She was a beauty, fair of form, good of countenance, so it is in the margin, *ver. 7.* Her wisdom and virtue were her greatest beauty, but it is an advantage to a diamond to be well set: (4.) Mordecai her cousin-german was her guardian, brought her up, and took her for his own daughter. The LXX. say he designed to make her his wife; if that were so, he was to be praised that he opposed not her better preferment. (5.) Let God be acknowledged in raising up friends for the fatherless and motherless; let it be an encouragement to the pious infancy or charity, that there have been many who have taken care of the education of orphans, that have lived to see the good fruit of their care and pains abundantly to their comfort. Dr. Lightfoot thinks this Mordecai is the same with that mentioned, *Ezra ii. 2.* who went up to Jerusalem with the first, and helped forward the settlement of his people, until the building of the temple was finished, and then went back to the Persian court to see what service he could do them there.

Mordecai being Esther's guardian or pro-parent, we are told, (1.) How tender he was of her, as if she had been his own child, *ver. 11.* he walked before her door every day, to know how she did, and what interest she had. Let those whose relations are thus cast upon them by the divine providence, be thus kindly affectioned to them, and solicitous for them. (2.) How respectful she was to him, though in relation she was his equal, yet in age and dependence being his inferior, she honoured him as her father did his commandment, *ver. 20.* This is an example to orphans; if they fall into the hands of those who love them and take care of them, let them make suitable returns of duty and obedience. The less obliged their guardians were in duty to provide for them, the more obliged they are in gratitude to honour and obey their guardians. Here is an instance of Esther's obsequiousness to Mordecai, that she did not shew her people or her kindred, because Mordecai had charged her that she should not, *ver. 10.* He did not bid her deny her country, nor tell a lie to conceal her parentage; if he had, she must not have done it: But he bid her not proclaim it; all truths are not to be spoken at all times, though an untruth is not to be spoken at any time. She being born in Shushan, and her parents being dead, all took her to be of Persian extraction, and she was not bound to undeceive them.

2. Her preferment. Who would have thought that a Jew, a captive, an orphan was born to be a queen, an empress! So it proved: Providence sometimes raises up the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes, *1 Sam. ii. 8.* (1.) The king's chamberlain honoured her, *ver. 9.* and was ready to serve her; wisdom and virtue will gain respect. They that make sure of God's favour shall find favour with man too, as far as it is good for them. All that looked upon Esther admired her, *ver. 15.* and concluded she was the lady that would win the prize; and so she did. (2.) The king himself fell in love with her. She was not solicitous as the rest of the maidens were to set herself off with artificial beauty, she required nothing but just what was appointed her, *ver. 15.* And yet she was most acceptable. Beauty the more natural the more agreeable. The king loved Esther above all the women, *ver. 17.* Now he needed not to make any farther trial, or take time to deliberate, he is soon determined to set the royal crown upon her head, and make her queen, *ver. 17.* This was done in his seventh year, *ver. 16.* Vashti was divorced in his third year, *chap. i. 3.* So that he was four years without a queen.

Notice is taken, (1.) Of the honours the king put upon Esther. He graced the solemnity of her coronation with a royal feast, *ver. 18.* at which perhaps Esther, in compliance with the king, made a public appearance, which Vashti had refused to do, that she might have the praise of obedience in the same instance in which the other incurred the plot of disobedience. He also granted a release to the provinces, either a remittance of the taxes in arrear, or an act of grace for criminals; as Pilate at the feast released a prisoner. This was to add to the joy. (2.) Of the deference Esther continued to pay to her quondam guardian; she still did the commandment of Mordecai as when she was brought up with him, *ver. 20.* Mordecai sat in the king's gate, that was the top of his preferment, he was one of the porters or door-keepers of the court; whether he had this place before, or Esther obtained it for him, we are not told, but there he sat contentedly, and aimed no higher; and yet Esther who was advanced to the throne, was observant of him. This was an evidence of an humble and grateful disposition; that she had a sense of his former kindness, and his continued wisdom: it is a great ornament to those who are advanced, and much their praise to remember their benefactor, to retain the impressions of their good education, to be dissident of themselves, willing to take advice, and thankful for it.

21. ¶ In those days (while Mordecai sat in the king's gate) two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus: 22. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king there-

of in Mordecai's name. 23. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out: therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

This good service which Mordecai did to the government, in discovering a plot against the life of the king, is here recorded, because the mention of it will again occur to his advantage. No step is yet taken towards Haman's design of the Jews' destruction, but several steps are taken towards God's design of their deliverance; and this for one; God now gave Mordecai an opportunity of doing the king a good turn, that he might have the fairer opportunity afterward of doing the Jews a good turn.

1. A design was laid against the king by two of his own servants, who fought to lay hand on him, not only to make him a prisoner, but to take away his life, *ver. 21*. Probably they resented some affront they thought he had given them, or some injury he had done them: who would be great, to be so much the object of envy? Who would be arbitrary, to be so much the object of ill-will? Princes above any mortals, have their souls continually in their hands, and often go down *stain to the pit*, especially those who caused their terror in the land of the living.

2. Mordecai got notice of their treason, and by Esther's means discovered it to the king, hereby confirming her in and recommending himself to the king's favour. How he came to the knowledge of it doth not appear, whether he overheard their discourse, or they offered to draw him in with them, so it was that *the thing was known to him*; which ought to be a warning against all traitorous and seditious practices, though they presume upon secrecy, *a bird of the air shall carry the voice*. And Mordecai, as soon as he knew it, gave notice of it to the king, which ought to be an instruction and example to all that would be found good subjects, not to conceal any ill design they know of against the prince or the public peace, for it is laying a confederacy with public enemies.

3. The traitors were hanged as they deserved, but not till it was upon search fully proved upon them, *ver. 23*. and the whole matter was recorded in the king's journals, with a particular remark that Mordecai was the man who discovered the treason. He was not rewarded presently, but a book of remembrance was written. Thus they who serve Christ, though their recompence is adjourned till the resurrection of the just, yet an account is kept of their *work of faith and labour of love*, which God is not *unrighteous to forget*, *Heb. vi. 10*.

C H A P. III.

A very black and mournful scene here opens, and which threatens the ruin of all the people of God: Were there not some such dark nights, the light of the morning would not be so welcome. (1.) Haman is made the king's favourite, *ver. 1*. (2.) Mordecai refuseth to give him the honour he demanded, *ver. 2-4*. (3.) Haman for his sake vows to be revenged upon all the Jews, *ver. 5, 6*. (4.) He upon a malicious suggestion obtains an order from the king to have them all massacred upon a certain day, *ver. 7-13*. (5.) This order is dispersed through the kingdom, *ver. 14, 15*.

1. **A**FTER these things did king Ahafuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. 2. And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him: but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. 3. Then the king's servants which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, why transgressest thou the king's commandment? 4. Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. 6. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahafuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

Here we have,

1. Haman advanced by the prince and adored thereupon by the people; he had lately laid Esther in his bosom, but he had no such interest in him, as to get her friends preferred, or to prevent the preferring of one that she knew was an enemy to her people. When those that are good become great, yet they find they cannot do good, nor prevent mischief as they would. This Haman was an Agagite, an Amalekite, saith Josephus, probably of the descendants of Agag; a common name of the princes of Amalek, as appears, *Numb. xxiv. 7*. and some think he was by birth a prince as Jehoiakim was, whose seat was set above the rest of the captive kings, *2 Kings xxv. 28*. as Haman's here was, *ver. 1*. The king took a fancy to him, (princes are not bound to give reasons for their favours) made him his favourite, his confident, his prime minister of state. And such a commanding influence the court then had, (that contrary to the proverb) whom it blessed, the country blessed too; for all men adored this rising sun, and the king's servants were particularly commanded to bow before him, and to do him reverence, *ver. 2*. and they did so. I wonder what the king saw in Haman, that was commendable or meritorious, it is plain, he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage, or steady conduct, but proud and passionate, and revengeful, yet promoted, and caressed, and who but he? Princes' darlings are not always worthies.

2. Mordecai adhering to his principles with a bold and daring resolution, and therefore refusing to reverence Haman, as the rest of the king's servants did, *ver. 2*. He was urged to it by his friends, who minded him of the king's commandment, and consequently of the danger he run upon, if he refused to comply with it: it was as much as his neck was worth, especially considering Haman's insolence, *ver. 3*. They spake daily to him, to persuade him to conform, but all in vain, he hearkened not to them, but told them plainly that he was a Jew, and could not in conscience do it; doubtless his refusal when it came to be taken notice of, and made the subject of

discourse, was commonly attributed to pride and envy, that he would not pay respect to Haman, because on the score of his alliance to Esther he was not himself as much promoted; or to a factious seditious spirit, and a disaffection to the king and his government; and those that would make the best of it looked upon it as his weakness, or his want of breeding, called it a humour and a piece of affected singularity; it doth not appear that any body else scrupled it but Mordecai only; and yet his refusal was pious, conscientious, and pleasing to God, for the religion of a Jew forbade him. (1.) To give such extravagant honours as were required to any mortal man, especially so wicked a man as Haman was. In the apocryphal chapters of this book, *chap. xiii. 12, 13, 14*. Mordecai is brought in thus appealing to God in this matter; *Thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Haman, for I could have been content with good will for the salvation of Israel, to kiss the soles of his feet, but I did this, that I might not prefer the glory of man, above the glory of God, neither will I worship any but thee*. (2.) He especially thought it a piece of injustice to his nation, to give such honour to an Amalekite, one of that devoted nation, with whom God had sworn he would have perpetual war, *Exod. xvii. 16*. and concerning which he had given that solemn charge, *Deut. xxv. 17*. Remember what Amalek did. Though religion doth by no means destroy good manners, but teaches us to render honour to whom honour is due, yet it is the character of a citizen of Zion, that not only in his heart but in his eyes such a vile person as Haman was is contemned, *Psalm. xv. 4*. And let those who are governed by principles of conscience, be steady and resolute, however censured or threatened, as Mordecai was.

3. Haman meditating revenge. Some that hoped thereby to curry favour with Haman, took notice to him of Mordecai's rudeness, waiting to see whether he would bend or break, *ver. 4*. Haman then observed it himself, and was full of wrath, *ver. 5*. A meek and humble man would have slighted the affront, and have said, let him have his humour, what am I the worse for it? but it makes Haman's proud spirit rage and fret, and boil within him, so that he becomes uneasy to himself and all about him. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. The head must off that will not bow to Haman; if he cannot have his honours, he will have his blood. It is as penal in this court not to worship Haman, as it was in Nebuchadnezzar's not to worship the golden image which he had set up. Mordecai is a person of quality, in a post of honour, and own cousin to the queen, and yet Haman thinks his life nothing towards a satisfaction for the affront, thousands of innocent and valuable lives must be sacrificed to his indignation; and therefore he vows the destruction of all the people of Mordecai, for his sake, because his being a Jew was the reason he gave why he did not reverence Haman. Herein appears Haman's intolerable pride, insatiable cruelty, and the ancient antipathy of an Amalekite to the Israel of God. Saul the son of Kish a Benjamite spared Agag, but Mordecai the son of Kish a Benjamite, (*chap. ii. 5*) shall find no mercy with this Agagite, whose design is to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahafuerus, *ver. 6*. which I suppose would include those that were returned to their own land, for that was now a province of his kingdom, *Come and let us cut them off from being a nation, Psalm. lxxxiii. 4*. Nero's barbarous wish is, that they had all but one neck.

7. ¶ In the first month (that is the month Nisan) in the twelfth year of king Ahafuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is the month Adar. 8. ¶ And Haman said unto king Ahafuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people, in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are divers from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. 9. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. 10. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. 11. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. 12. Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province, according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahafuerus was it written and sealed with the king's ring. 13. And the letters were sent by post into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, (which is the month Adar) and to take the spoil of them for a prey. 14. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province, was published unto all people, that they shall be ready against that day. 15. The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace; and the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed.

Haman values himself upon that bold and daring thought which he fancied well became his great spirit, of destroying all the Jews: an undertaking worthy of its author, and which he promised himself would perpetuate his memory. He doubts not but to find desperate and bloody hands enow to cut all their throats, if the king will but give him leave; how he obtained leave, and commission to do it, we are here told. He had the king's ear, let him alone to manage him.

1. He makes a false and malicious representation of the Jews, and their character to the king, *ver. 8*. The enemies of God's people could not give them such ill treatment as they do, if they did not first put them into an ill name

name. He would have the king believe, (1.) That the Jews were a despicable people, and it was not for his credit to harbour them. *A certain people there is, without name, as if nobody knew whence they came, and what they were, they are not incorporated, but scattered abroad and dispersed in all the provinces as fugitives and vagabonds on the earth, and inmates in all countries, the burden and scandal of the places where they live.* (2.) That they were a dangerous people, and it was not safe to harbour them. They have laws and usages of their own, and conform not to the statutes of the kingdom and the customs of the country; and therefore might be looked upon as disaffected to the government, and likely to infect others with their singularities, which may end in a rebellion. It is no new thing for the best of men to have such individious characters as these given of them; if it be no sin to kill them, it is no sin to believe them.

2. He bids high for leave to *destroy them all*, ver. 9. He knew there were many that hated the Jews, and would willingly fall upon them, if they might but have a commission, *let it be written therefore, that they may be destroyed*, give but orders for a general massacre of all the Jews, and Haman will undertake it shall be easily done, if the king will gratify him in this matter, he will make him a present of *ten thousand talents*, which shall be paid into the king's treasuries. This he thought would be a powerful inducement to the king to consent, and would obviate the strongest objection against him, which was that the government must needs sustain loss in its revenues, by the destruction of so many of its subjects: so great a sum he hoped would be equivalent for that. Proud and malicious men will not stick at the expences of their revenge, nor spare any cost to gratify it; yet, no doubt, Haman knew how to re-imburse himself out of the spoil of the Jews, which his janizaries were to seize for him, ver. 13. and so to make them bear the charges of their own ruin; while he himself hoped to be not only a faver, but a gainer by the bargain.

3. He obtains what he desired, a full commission to do what he would with the Jews, ver. 10, 11. The king was so mindless of business, and so bewitched with Haman, that he took no time to examine the truth of his allegations, but was as willing as Haman could wish, to believe the worst concerning the Jews, and therefore gives them up into his hands, as lambs to the lion? *the people are thine, do unto them as it seemeth good unto thee*; he doth not say, kill them, slay them, hoping Haman's own cooler thoughts would abate the rigour of that sentence, and sell them for slaves, but do what thou wilt with them. And so little consideration he had how much he should lose in his tribute, and how much Haman would gain in the spoil, that he gave him *withal the ten thousand talents, the silver is thine*. Such an implicit confidence likewise he had in Haman, and so perfectly had he abandoned all care of his kingdom, that he gave Haman his ring, his privy-seal or sign-manual, wherewith to confirm whatever edict he pleased to draw up to this purpose. Miserable is the kingdom that is at the dispose of such a head as this, which has one ear only and a nose to be led by, but neither eyes nor brains, nor scarce a tongue of its own.

4. He then consults with his sooth-sayers, to find out a lucky day for the designed massacre, ver. 7. The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years; some day or other in that year it must be pitched upon; as if he doubted not but that heaven would favour his design, and further it, he refers it to the lot *i. e.* to the divine providence, to choose the day for him, but that in the decision proved a better friend to the Jews than to him; for the lot fell upon the twelfth month, so that Mordecai and Esther had eleven months to turn them in, for the defeating of the design, or if they could not, space would be left for the Jews to make their escape and shift for their safety. Haman, though eager to have the Jews cut off, yet will submit to the laws of his superstition, and not anticipate the supposed fortunate day, or not to gratify his impatient revenge. Probably he was in some fear lest the Jews should prove too hard for their enemies: and therefore durst not venture on such a hazardous enterprise, but under the smiles of a good omen. This may shame us, who often acquiesce not in the directions and disposals of providence when they cross our desires and intentions. He that believeth the lot, much more that believeth the promise, will not make haste. But see how God's wisdom serves its own purposes by men's folly: Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go, which by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him, and breaks the neck of the plot.

5. The bloody edict is hereupon drawn up, signed and published, giving orders to the militia of every province to be ready against the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and on that day to murder all the Jews, men, and women and children, and seize their effects, ver. 12, 13, 14. Had the decree been to banish all the Jews, and expel them out of the king's dominions, it had been severe enough, but sure never any act of cruelty appeared so barefaced as this, to *destroy, to kill and to cause to perish all the Jews*: appointing them as *sheep for the slaughter*, without shewing any cause why or wherefore. No crime is laid to their charge, it is not pretended that they were obnoxious to the public justice, nor is any condition offered upon performance of which they might have their lives spared, but die they must, without mercy. Thus have the church's enemies thirsted after blood, the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus, and drunk of it till they have been perfectly intoxicated, (Rev. xvii. 6.) yet still like the horse leech, crying give, give. This cruel order is ratified with the king's seal, directed to the king's lieutenants, and drawn up in the king's name, and yet the king knows not what he doth. Posts are sent out with all expedition to carry copies of the decree to the respective provinces, ver. 15. See how restless the malice of the church's enemies is, it will spare no pains, it will lose no time.

6. The different temper of the court and city hereupon. (1.) The court was very merry upon it; the king and Haman sat down to drink, perhaps to drink confusion to all the Jews. Haman was afraid, lest the king's conscience should smite him for what he had done, and he should begin to wish it undone again, to prevent which he ingrossed him to himself, and kept him drinking: this cursed method many take to drown their convictions, and harden their own hearts, and the hearts of others in sin. (2.) The city was very sad upon it, and the other cities of the kingdom no doubt when they had notice of it, *the city of Shushan was perplexed*; not only the Jews themselves, but all their neighbours that had any principles of justice and compassion. It grieved them to see their king so abused, *wickedness in the place of judgment*, Eccl. iii. 16. to see men that lived peaceably treated so barbarously, and what would be the consequences of it to themselves they knew not. But the king and Haman cared for none of these things. Note, it is an absurd and impious thing to indulge ourselves in mirth and pleasure, when the church is in distress, and the public perplexed.

C H A P. IV.

We left God's Isaac bound upon the altar, and ready to be sacrificed, and the enemies triumphing in the prospect of it; but things here begin to work towards a deliverance, and they begin at the right end. (1.) The Jews' friends lay to heart the danger, and lament it, ver. 1—4. (2.) Matters are concerted between Mordecai and

Esther for the preventing of it, (1.) Esther inquires into this case, and receives a particular account of it, ver. 5—7. (2.) Mordecai urges her to intercede with the king for a revocation of the edict, ver. 8, 9. (3.) Esther objected the danger of addressing the king uncalled, ver. 10—12. (4.) Mordecai pressed her to run the venture, ver. 13, 14. (5.) Esther, after a religious fast of three days, promised to do so, ver. 15—17. and we shall find it sped well.

1. **W**HEN Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry: 2. And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 3. And in every province whithersoever the king's commandment, and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. 4. ¶ So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved, and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.

Here we have an account of the general sorrow that was among the Jews, upon the publishing of Haman's bloody edict against them. It was a sad time with the church.

1. Mordecai cried bitterly, *rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth*, ver. 1. 2. He not only thus vented his grief, but proclaimed it, that all might take notice of it, that he was not ashamed to own himself a friend to the Jews, and a fellow-sufferer with them, their brother and companion in tribulation, how despicable and how odious soever they were now represented by Haman's faction. It was bravely done, thus publicly to espouse what he knew to be a righteous cause, and the cause of God, even then when it seemed a desperate and sinking cause. Mordecai laid the danger to heart more than any, because he knew that Haman's spite was against him primarily, and it was for his sake that the rest of the Jews were struck at; and therefore though he did not repent of his stiffness, for he persisted in it, chap. v. 9. yet it troubled him greatly, that his people should suffer for his scruples, which perhaps occasioned some of them to reflect upon him as too precise: But being able to appeal to God, that what he did, he did from a principle of conscience; he could with comfort *commit his own cause*, and that of his people to him that judgeth righteously. God will keep those that are exposed by the tenderness of their consciences. Notice is here taken of a law, that *none might enter into the king's gate clothed in sackcloth*; though the arbitrary power of their kings often, as now, set many a mourning, yet none must come near the king in a mourning dress, because he was not willing to hear the complaints of such. Nothing but what was gay and pleasant must appear at court, and every thing that was melancholy must be banished thence; all in king's palaces wear soft clothing, Mat. xi. 8. not sackcloth: But this to keep out the badges of sorrow, unless they could withal have kept out the causes of sorrow; to forbid sackcloth to enter, unless they could have forbidden sickness and trouble, and death to enter, was a jest. However this obliged Mordecai to keep his distance, and only to come before the gate, nor to take his place in the gate.

2. All the Jews in every province laid it much to heart, ver. 3. They denied themselves the comfort of their tables, for they fasted and mingled tears with their meat and drink; and the comfort of their beds at night, for they lay in sackcloth and ashes. They who for want of confidence in God and affection to their own land, had staid in the land of their captivity, when Cyrus gave them liberty to be gone, now perhaps repented of their folly, and wished when it was too late, they had complied with the call of God.

3. Esther the queen, upon a general intimation of the trouble Mordecai was in, was exceedingly grieved, ver. 4. Mordecai's grief was hers, such a respect did she still retain for him; and the Jews danger was her distress, for though a queen, she forgot not her relation to them. Let not the greatest think it below them to grieve for the affliction of Joseph, though they themselves be anointed with the chief ointments, Amos vi. 6. Esther sent change of raiment to Mordecai, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness; but because he would make her sensible of the greatness of his grief, and consequently of the cause of it he received it not, but was as one that refused to be comforted.

5. Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and who it was. 6. So Hatach went forth to Mordecai, unto the street of the city which was before the king's gate. 7. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews to destroy them. 8. Also he gave him a copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. 9. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. 10. ¶ Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai: 11. All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. 12. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. 13. Then Mordecai com-
manded

manded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. 14. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth, whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this? 15. ¶ Then Esther bade them return Mordecai *this answer*. 16. Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. 17. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

So strictly did the laws of Persia confine the wives, especially the kings wives, that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther about this important affair, but divers messages are here carried between them, by Hatach, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and, it seems, he was one she could confide in.

1. She sent to Mordecai to know more particularly and fully what the trouble was, which he was now lamenting, (*ver. 5.*) and why it was that he would not put off his sackcloth. To enquire thus after news, that we may know the better how to direct our griefs and joys, our prayers and praise, well becomes all that love Sion. If we must weep with them that weep, we must know why they weep.

(2.) Mordecai sent her an authentic account of the whole matter, with a charge to her to intercede with the king in this matter. Mordecai told him *all that had happened unto him*, *ver. 7.* what a pique Haman had against him for not bowing to him, and by what arts he had procured this edict. He sent her also a true copy of the edict, that she might see what imminent danger she and her people were in; and charged her if she had any respect for him, or any kindness for the Jewish nation, that she should appear now on their behalf, rectify the misinformations with which the king was imposed upon, and set the matter in a true light, not doubting but that then he would vacate the decree.

3. She sent her case to Mordecai, that she could not without peril of her life address the king, and therefore he put a great hardship upon her, in urging her to it; gladly would she wait, gladly would she stoop to do the Jews a kindness, but if she must run the hazard of being put to death as a malefactor, she might well say, *I pray thee have me excused*, and find out some other intercessor. (1.) The law was express, all knew it; that whoever comes to the king uncalled, should be put to death, unless he was pleased to *hold out the golden sceptre to them*, and it was ten to one whether he should find him in so good a humour, *ver. 11.* This law was made not so much in prudence, for the greater safety of the king's person, as in pride, that being seldom seen, and not without great difficulty, he might be adored as a little god. A foolish law it was, for, (1.) It made the kings themselves unhappy, confining them to their retirements for fear they should be seen. This made the royal palace little better than a royal prison, and the kings themselves could not but become morose, and perhaps melancholy, and so a terror to others, and a burden to themselves. Many have their lives made miserable by their own haughtiness and ill-nature. (2.) It was bad for their subjects, for what good had they of a king that they might never have liberty to apply to for the redress of grievances, and appeal to some inferior judges? It is not thus in the court of the King of kings; to the footstool of his throne of grace we may at any time *come boldly*, and may be sure of an answer of peace to the prayer of faith. We are welcome not only into the inner court, but even into the holiest, through the blood of Jesus. (3.) It was particularly very uncomfortable for their wives, that there was not a proviso in the law to accept them, who were *done of their bone*, and *flesh of their flesh*: But perhaps it was wickedly intended as much against them as any other, that the kings might the more freely enjoy their concubines, and Esther knew it. Miserable was the kingdom, when the princes framed their laws to serve their lusts.

(2.) Her case was at present very discouraging; Providence so ordered it, that just at this juncture she was under a cloud, and the king's affections cooled towards her, for she had been *kept from his presence thirty days*; that her faith and courage might be the more tried, and that God's goodness in the favour she now found with the king notwithstanding might shine the brighter. It is likely Haman, as he endeavoured by wine, so also by women, to divert the king from thinking of what he had done, and then Esther was neglected; from whom no doubt he did what he could to alienate the king, knowing her to be his back friend.

4. Mordecai still insisted upon it, that whatever hazard she run she must apply herself to the king in this great affair, *ver. 13, 14.* No excuse will serve, but she must appear an advocate in this cause; he suggests to her,

(1.) That it was her own cause, for the decree to *destroy all the Jews*, did not except her: *Think not therefore that thou shalt escape in the king's house*, that the palace will be thy protection, and the crown save thy head: No, thou art a Jew, and if the rest be cut off, thou wilt be cut off too. It was certainly her wisdom rather to expose herself to a conditional death from her husband, than to a certain death from her enemy.

(2.) That it was a cause which one way or other would certainly be carried, and which therefore she might safely venture in. If thou shouldst decline the service, *enlargement and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place*. This was the language of a strong faith, which staggered not at the promise when the danger was most threatening, but *against hope believed in hope*. Instruments may fail, but God's covenant will not.

(3.) That if she deserted her friends now through cowardice, and unbelief, she would have reason to fear, that some judgment from heaven would be the ruin of her and her family; *Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed*, when the rest of the families of the Jews shall be preserved. He that by sinful shifts will save his life, and cannot find in his heart to trust God with it in the way of duty, shall lose it in the way of sin.

(4.) That the divine Providence had an eye to this, in bringing her to be queen; *Who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?* And therefore, (1.) Thou art bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his church, else thou dost not answer the end of thine elevation. (2.) Thou needest not fear miscarrying in the enterprise; if God designed thee for it, he will bear thee out, and give thee success. Now, 1. It appeared by the event, that she did come to the kingdom that she might be an instrument of the Jews' deliverance, so that Mordecai was right in the conjecture; *Because the Lord loved his people*, therefore he made Esther queen. There is a wise counsel and design in all the providences of God,

which is unknown to us till it is accomplished, but it will prove in the issue, that they are all intended for, and center in the good of the church.

2. The probability of this was a good reason why she should now bestir herself, and do her utmost for her people. We should every one of us consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and study to answer that end; and when any particular opportunity of serving God and our generations offers itself, we must take care we do not let it slip, for we were intrusted with it, that we might improve it.

These things Mordecai urged to Esther, and some of the Jewish writers who are fruitful in invention, and another thing which had *happened to him*, (*ver. 7.*) which he desired she might be told; that going home the night before in great heaviness upon the notice of Haman's plot, he met three Jewish children coming from school, whom he examined what they had learned that day, one of them told him his lesson was, *Prov. iii. 25, 26. Be not afraid of sudden fear*. The second told him his was, *Isa. viii. 10. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought*. The third told him his was, *Isa. xli. 4. I have made, and will bear, even I will carry and will deliver you*. O the goodness of God, saith Mordecai, who out of the mouth of babes and sucklings ordains strength!

5. Esther hereupon resolves, whatever it cost her, to apply herself to the king, but not till she and her friends had first applied themselves to God: Let them first by fasting and prayer obtain God's favour, and then she should hope to find favour with the king, *ver. 15, 16.* She speaks here,

1. With the piety and devotion that became an Israelite; she had her eye up unto God, in whose hand the hearts of kings are, and on whom the depended, to incline the king's heart towards her. She went in peril of her life, but would think herself safe, and would be easy when she had committed the keeping of her soul to God, and had put herself under his protection. She believed God's favour was to be obtained by prayer, that his people are a praying people, and he a prayer-hearing God. She knew it was the practice of good people, in extraordinary cases, to join fasting with prayer, and many of them to join together in fasting and prayer. She therefore, (1.) Desired that Mordecai would direct the Jews that were in Shushan, to *sanctify a fast, and call a solemn assembly*, to meet in the respective synagogues to which they belonged, and to pray for her, and to keep a solemn fast, abstaining from all set meals and all pleasant food for three days, and as much as possible from all food, in token of their humiliation for sin, and in a sense of their unworthiness of God's mercy. Those know not how to value the divine favours, who grudge thus much labour, and self-denial in the pursuit of it. (2.) She promised that she and her family would sanctify this fast in the apartment of her palace, for the might not come to their assemblies; her maids were either Jews, or so far proselytes, that they joined with her in her fasting and praying: Here is a good example of her mistress praying with her maids, and it is worthy to be imitated. Observe also, That those who are confined to privacy, may join their prayers with those of the solemn assemblies of God's people; they that are absent in the body may be present in Spirit. And that those who desire, and have the prayers of others for them, must not think that that will excuse them from praying for themselves.

2. With the courage and resolution that became a queen. When we have sought God in this matter, *I will go in unto the king* to intercede for my people; *I know it is not according to the king's law*, but it is according to God's law; and therefore whatever comes of it, I will venture, and not count my life dear to me, so that I may serve God and his church, and if *I perish, I perish*, I cannot lose my life in a better cause. Better do my duty, and die for my people, than baulk my duty, and die with them; the reasons as the lepers, *2 Kings vii. 4. If I sit still, I die*; if I venture I may live, and be the life of my people; if the worst come to the worst (as we say) *I shall but die*. Nothing venture, nothing win. She said not this in despair or passion, but in a holy resolution to do her duty, and trust God with the issue, welcome his holy will. In the apocryphal part of this book, *chap. xiii. and xiv.* we have Mordecai's prayer and Esther's upon this occasion, and both of them very particular and pertinent. In the sequel of the story we shall find, that God said not to this seed of Jacob, *Seek ye me in vain*.

C H A P. V.

The last news we had of Haman left him in his cups, *chap. iii. 15.* Our last news of queen Esther, left her in tears, fasting and praying. Now this chapter bring in, (1.) Esther in her joys; *smiled upon by the king, and honoured with his company at her banquet of wine*, *ver. 1—8.* (2.) Haman upon the fret, *because he had not Mordecai's cup and knee, and with great indignation setting up a gallows for him*, *ver. 9—14.* Thus they that sow in tears shall reap in joy, but the triumphing of the wicked is short.

1. **N**OW it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. 2. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand: so Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter. 3. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee, to the half of the kingdom. 4. And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. 5. Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said: so the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 6. ¶ And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. 7. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; 8. If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request,

quest, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said.

Here is, 1. Esther's bold approach to the king, *ver. 1.* When the time appointed for their fast was finished, she lost no time, but on the third day, when the impressions of her devotions were fresh upon her spirit, she addressed to the king. When the heart is enlarged in communion with God, it will be emboldened in doing and suffering for him. Some think the three days fast, was only one day, and two whole nights, in all which time they did not take any food at all, and this is called three days, as Christ's lying in the grave so long is. This favours that exposition, that on the third day the queen made her appearance at court. Resolutions that have difficulties and dangers to break through, should be pursued without delay, lest they cool and slacken: *What thou doest, which must be done boldly, do it quickly.* Now she put on her royal apparel, that she might the better recommend herself to the king, and laid aside her fast-day clothes. She put on her fine clothes, not to please herself but her husband; in her prayer, as we find it in the Apocrypha, *Esther xiv. 16.* she thus appeals to God, *Thou knowest, Lord, I abhor the sign of my high estate, which is upon my head, in the days wherein I shew myself, &c.* Whence let those whose rank obligeth them to wear rich clothes, learn to be dead to them, and not make them their adorning. She stood in the inner court over against the king, expecting her doom between hope and fear.

2. The favourable reception which the king gave her. When he saw her, she obtained favour in his sight. The apocryphal author and Josephus say, that she took two maids with her, on one she leaned, and the other bore up her train; that her countenance was cheerful and very amiable, but her heart was in anguish; that the king lifting up his countenance that shone with majesty, at first looked very fiercely upon her; whereupon she grew pale and fainted, and bowed herself on the head of the maid that went by her: but then God changed the spirit of the king, and in a fear he leaped from his throne, took her in his arms till she came to herself, and comforted her with loving words: here we are only told,

1. That he protected her from the law, and assured her of safety, by holding out to her the golden scepter, *ver. 2.* which she thankfully touched the top of, thereby presenting herself to him as a humble petitioner. Thus having had power with God and prevailed, like Jacob, she had power with men too. *He that will lose his life for God shall save it, or find it in a better life.*

2. That he encouraged her address, *ver. 3.* *What wilt thou, queen Esther, and what is thy request?* So far was he from counting her an offender, that he seemed glad to see her, and desirous to oblige her. He that had divorced one wife for not coming when she was sent for, would not be severe to another for coming when she was not sent for. God can turn the hearts of men, of great men, of those that act most arbitrarily, which way he pleaseth towards us. Esther feared she should perish, but is promised she shall have what she asks for, though it were *the half of the kingdom.* Note, God in his providence often prevents the fears, and outdoes the hopes of his people, especially when they venture in his cause. Let us from this story infer, as our Saviour doth from the parable of the unjust judge, an encouragement to pray always to our God, and not faint, *Luke xviii. 6, 7, 8.* Hear what this haughty king saith, *What is thy petition, and what is thy request, it shall be granted thee;* and say, *shall not God hear and answer the prayers of his own elect, that cry day and night to him?* Esther came to a proud imperious man, we come to the God of love and grace: She was not called; we are; the Spirit saith come, and the bride saith come. She had a law against her, we have a promise, many a promise, in favour of us, *Ask and it shall be given you.* She had no friend to introduce her, or intercede for her; but on the contrary, he that was then the king's favourite, was her enemy. But we have an advocate with the Father, in whom he is well pleased, *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.*

3. That all the request she had to make to him at this time was, that he would please to come to a banquet which she had prepared for him, and bring Haman along with him, *ver. 4, 5.* Hereby (1.) She would intimate to him how much she valued his favour and company. Whatever she had to ask, that she desired above any thing, and would purchase at any rate. (2.) She would try how he stood affected to her, if he should refuse this, it would be to no purpose as yet to present her other request. (3.) She would endeavour to bring him into a pleasant humour, and soften his spirit, that he might with the more tenderness receive the impressions of the complaint she had to make to him. (4.) She would oblige him, by making court to Haman his favourite, and inviting him to come, whose company she knew he loved, and whom she desired to have present when she made her complaint, for she would say nothing of him, but what she durst say to his face. (5.) She hoped at the banquet of wine to have a fairer and more favourable opportunity of presenting her petition. Wisdom is profitable, to direct how to manage some men that are hard to deal with, and to take by the right handle.

4. That he readily came, and ordered Haman to come along with him, *ver. 5.* which was an indication of the kindness he still retained for her; if he really designed the destruction of her and her people, he would not have accepted of her banquet. There he renewed his kind enquiry, *What is thy petition?* and his generous promise, that it should be granted, *even to the half of the kingdom,* *ver. 6.* a proverbial expression, by which he assured her, that he would deny her nothing in reason. Herod used it, *Mark vi. 23.*

5. That then Esther thought fit to ask no more, but a promise that he would please to accept of another treat, the next day in her apartment, and Haman with him, *ver. 7, 8.* intimating to him, that then she would let him know what her business was. This adjourning of the main petition may be attributed, (1.) To Esther's prudence; by this means she hoped yet further to win upon him, and ingratiate herself with him. Perhaps her heart failed her now, when she was going to make her request, and she desired to take some further time for prayer, that God would give her a mouth and wisdom. The putting it off thus, it is likely, she new would be well taken as an expression of the great reverence she had for the king, and her lothness to be too pressing upon him. What is hastily asked, is many times as hastily denied, but what is asked with a pause, deserves to be considered. (2.) To God's providence, putting it into Esther's heart to delay her petition a day longer, she knew not why, but God did, that what was to happen in the intervening night betwixt that and to-morrow, might further her design, and make way for her success; that Haman might arrive to the highest pitch of malice against Mordecai, and might begin to fall before him. The Jews perhaps blamed Esther as dilatory, and some of them began to suspect her sincerity, or at least her zeal, but the event proved their jealousy, and all was for the best.

9. ¶ Then went Haman forth that day, joyful, and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in No. LXIX.*

the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved, for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. 10. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself, and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zereb his wife. 11. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. 12. Haman said moreover, Yea Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. 13. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. 14. ¶ Then said Zereb his wife, and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king, that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king into the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman, and he caused the gallows to be made.

This account here given of Haman, is a comment upon that of Solomon, *Prov. xxi. 24.* *Proud and haughty scorner is his name that deals in proud wrath;* never did any man more answer that name than Haman here, in whom pride and wrath have so much the ascendant. See him.

1. Puffed up with the honour of being invited to Esther's feast. He was joyful and glad of heart at it, *ver. 9.* Observe with what a great gust he speaks of it, *ver. 12.* how he values himself upon it, and how near he thinks it brings him to the perfection of felicity, that Esther the queen did let no man come with the king to the banquet, but his mighty self, and he thought it was because she was exceedingly charmed with his conversation, that the next day she had invited him also to come with the king; none so fit as he to bear the king company. Note, Self-admirers and self-flatterers are really self-deceivers. Haman pleased himself with the fancy, that the queen by this repeated invitation designed to honour him, whereas she really designed to accuse him, and in calling him to the banquet, did but call him to the bar. What magnifying glasses do proud men look at their faces in! And how doth the pride of their hearts deceive them! *Obad. 3.*

2. Vexing and fretting at the sight that Mordecai put upon him, and thereby made uneasy to himself, and to all about him. (1.) Mordecai was as stiff as ever, *he stood not up, nor moved for him,* *ver. 9.* What he did was from a principle of conscience, and therefore he stuck to it, and would not cringe to Haman, no not when he had reason to fear him, and Esther herself complimented him. He knew God could and would deliver him and his people from the rage of Haman, without any such mean and sneaking expedients to mollify him. They that walk in a holy sincerity, may walk in a holy security, and go on in their work, not fearing what man can do unto them. *He that walks uprightly, walks surely.* (2.) Haman can as ill bear it as ever; nay, the higher he is lifted up, the more impatient is he of contempt, and the more enraged at it. (1.) It makes his own spirit restless, and put him into a grievous toils; he was full of indignation, *ver. 9.* and yet refrained himself, *ver. 10.* Gladly would he have drawn his sword, and run Mordecai through for affronting him thus, but he hoped shortly to see him fall with all the Jews, and therefore with much ado prevailed with himself to forbear stabbing him. What a struggle had he in his own bosom between his anger, which required Mordecai's death immediately; *O that I had of his flesh, I cannot be satisfied!* *Job xxxi. 31.* and his malice, which had determined him to wait for the general massacre. Thus thorns and snarles are in the way of the forward. (2.) It made all his enjoyments sapless; this little affront he received from Mordecai, was the dead fly which spoiled all his pot of precious ointment; he owned it himself in the presence of his wife and his friends, to the everlasting reproach of a proud and discontented mind, that he had no comfort in his estate, a refinement and family, as long as Mordecai lived, and had a place in the king's gate, *ver. 10.* 11, 13. He took notice of his own riches and honours, the numerousness of his family, and the high posts to which he was advanced, that he was the darling of the prince, and the idol of the court, and yet all this avails him nothing, as long as Mordecai is unchanged. Those that are disposed to be uneasy, will never want something or other to be uneasy at; and proud men, though they have much to their mind, if they have not all to their mind, it is as nothing to them. The thousandth part of what Haman had, would serve to make a humble modest man as much of happiness as he expects from this world, and yet Haman complains as passionately as if he had been sunk into the lowest degree of poverty and disgrace.

3. Meditating revenge, and assisted therein by his wife and his friends, *ver. 14.* They saw how gladly he would dispense with his own resolution, of deferring the slaughter till the time determined by the lot, and therefore advised him to take an earnest and foretaste of the satisfaction he then expected in the speedy execution of Mordecai; let him have that to stay his stomach: And having, as he thought, made sure of the destruction of all the Jews, at the time appointed, he will not think scorn for the present to lay hands on Mordecai alone. (1.) For the pleasing of his fancy, they advise him to get a gallows ready, and have it set up before his own door; that as soon as ever he could get the warrant signed, there might be no delay of the execution, he need not so much as stay the making of the gallows. This is very agreeable to Haman, who has the gallows up presently, it must be fifty cubits high, or as near that as might be for the greater disgrace of Mordecai, and to make him a spectacle to every one that passed by; and it must be before Haman's door, that all men might take notice it was to the idol of his revenge that Mordecai was sacrificed, and that he might feed his eyes with the sight. (2.) For the gaining of his point, they advise him to go early in the morning to the king, and get an order from him for the hanging of Mordecai, which they doubted not would be readily granted to one that was to much the king's favourite, and who had so easily obtained an edict for the destruction of the whole nation of the Jews; there needed no feigned suggestion, it was enough if he let the king know, that Mordecai, in contempt of the king's command, refused to reverence him. And now we leave Haman to go to bed, pleased with the thoughts of seeing Mordecai hanged the next day, and then going merrily to the banquet, and not dreaming of handfelling his own gallows.

C H A P. VI.

It is a very surprising scene that opens in this chapter: Haman, when he hoped to be Mordecai's judge, was made his page, to his great confusion

confusion and mortification; and thus way was made for the defeat of Haman's plot, and the deliverance of the Jews. (1.) The providence of God recommends Mordecai in the night to the king's favour, ver. 1—3. (2.) Haman who came to incense the king against him, is employed as an instrument of the king's favour to him, ver. 4—11. (3.) From this his friends read him his doom, which is executed in the next chapter, ver. 12, 13, 14. And now it appears, that Esther's intercession for her people was happily answered, *De die in diem*.

1. **O**N that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles: and they were read before the king. 2. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. 3. And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

How Satan put it into the heart of Haman to contrive Mordecai's death, we read in the foregoing chapter; how God put it into the heart of the king to contrive Mordecai's honour, we are here told; now if the king's word will prevail above Haman's, for though Haman be a great man, the king on the throne must be above him; much more will the counsel of God stand, whatever devices there are in men's hearts; it is to no purpose therefore for Haman to oppose it, when both God and the king will have Mordecai honoured, and that in this juncture, when his preferment, and Haman's disappointment, would help to ripen the great affair of the Jews' deliverance, for the effort that Esther was to make towards it the next day. Sometimes delay may prove to have been good conduct: Stay awhile, and we may have done the sooner; *Cunctando restituit rem*. Let us trace the steps which Providence took towards the advancement of Mordecai.

1. *On that night could not the king sleep.* His sleep fled away, so the word is, and perhaps like a shadow, the more carefully he pursued it, the farther it went from him. Sometimes we cannot sleep, because we fain would sleep. Even after a banquet of wine he could not sleep, when Providence had a design to serve in keeping him waking. We read of no bodily indisposition he was under that might break his sleep, but God whose gift sleep is, withheld it from him. Those that are never so much resolved to cast away care, cannot always do it, they find it in their pillows when they neither expect nor welcome it. He that commanded one hundred twenty-seven provinces could not command one hour's sleep. Perhaps the charms of Esther's conversation the day before, gave occasion to his heart to reproach him for neglecting her, and banishing her his presence, though she was the wife of his bosom, for above thirty days, and that might keep him waking. An offended conscience can find a time to speak when it will be heard.

2. When he could not sleep, he called to have the book of records, the journals of his reign, read to him, ver. 1. Surely he did not design that should lull him asleep, it would rather fill his head with cares, and drive away sleep: but God put it into his heart to call for them, rather than for music or songs, which the Persian kings used to be attended with, *Dan. vi. 18.* and which would have been more likely to compose him to rest. When men do that which is unaccountable, we know not what God intends by it. Perhaps he would have this book of business read to him, that he might improve time, and be laying some useful projects. Had it been king David's case, he would have found some other entertainment for his thoughts when he could not sleep, he would have remembered God, and meditated upon him, *Psal. lxxiii. 6.* and if he would have had any book read to him, it should have been his Bible, for in that law did he meditate day and night.

3. The servant that read to him, either lighted first on that article which concerned Mordecai, or reading long came to it at length. Among other things it was found written, that Mordecai had discovered a plot against the life of the king, which prevented the execution of it, ver. 2. Mordecai was not in such favour at court, that the reader should designedly pitch upon that page, but Providence directed him to it; nay, if we may believe the Jews' tradition (as Bishop Patrick relates it) opening the book at this place, he turned over the leaves, and would have read another part of the book, but the leaves flew back again to the same place where he opened it, so that he was forced to read that paragraph. How Mordecai's good service was recorded, we read chap. ii. 23. and here it is found upon record.

4. The king inquired what honour and dignity had been done to Mordecai for this, suspecting that this good service had gone unrewarded, and like Pharaoh's butler, he remembers it as his fault this day, *Gen. xli. 9.* Note, The law of gratitude is a law of nature; we ought particularly to be grateful to our inferiors, and not to think all their services due debts to us, but that they make us indebted to them. Two rules of gratitude may be gathered from the king's inquiry here. (1.) *Better honour than nothing:* If we cannot, or need not, make a recompense to those who have been kind to us, yet let us do them honour, by acknowledging kindnesses, and owning our obligations to them. (2.) *Better late than never.* If we have long neglected to make grateful returns for good offices done us, let us at length bethink ourselves of our debts.

5. The servants informed him, that nothing had been done to Mordecai for that eminent service; in the king's gate he sat before, and there he still sat. Note, (1.) It is common for great men to take little notice of their inferiors. The king knew not whether Mordecai was preferred or not, till his servants informed him. High spirits take a pride in being careless and unconcerned about those that are below them, and ignorant of their state. The great God takes cognizance of the meanest of his servants, knows what dignity is done them, and what disgrace. (2.) Humility and modesty and self-denial, though in God's account they are of great price, yet they commonly baulk men's preferment in the world. Mordecai riseth no higher than the king's gate, while proud ambitious Haman gets the king's ear and heart: but though the aspiring rise fast, the humble stand fast: honour makes proud men giddy, but upholds the humble in spirit, *Prov. xxix. 23.* (3.) Honour and dignity is rated high in the king's books. He doth not ask what reward has been given to Mordecai? What money? What estate? but only what honour? A poor thing, and which if he had not wherewith to support it would be but a burden. (1.) The greatest merits, and the best services are often overlooked and go unrewarded among men: little honour is done to those who best deserve it, are fittest for it, and would do most good with it. See *Ecc. ix. 14, 15, 16.* The acquisition of wealth and honour is usually a perfect lottery, in which they that venture least, commonly carry off the best prize. Nay, (5.) Good services are sometimes so far from being a man's preferment, that they will not be his protection;

Mordecai is at this time by the king's edict doomed to destruction, with all the Jews, though it is owned he deserved dignity. Those that faithfully serve God need not fear being thus ill paid.

4. ¶ And the king said, Who is in the court? (now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.) 5. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. 6. So Haman came in: and the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? (Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour, more than to myself?) 7. And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, 8. Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon: and the crown royal which is set upon his head: 9. And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. 10. Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel, and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. 11. Then took Haman the apparel, and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

It is now morning; and people begin to stir.

1. Haman is so impatient to get Mordecai hanged, that he comes early to court, to be ready at the king's levee, before any other business was brought before him, to get a warrant for his execution, (ver. 4.) which he doubts not to have at the first word. The king would gratify him in a greater thing than that; and he could tell the king that he was so confident of the justice of his request, and the king's favour to him in it, that he had got the gallows ready, one word from the king would complete his satisfaction.

2. The king is so impatient to have Mordecai honoured, that he sends to know who was in the court that was fit to be employed in it. Word is brought him that Haman is in the court; ver. 6. Let him come in, saith the king; the fittest man to be made use of both in directing and dispensing the king's favours; and the king knows nothing of any quarrel he had with Mordecai. Haman is brought in immediately proud of the honour done him, in being admitted into the king's bed-chamber, as it should seem before he was up; for let the king but give orders for the dignifying of Mordecai, and he will be easy in his mind, and try to sleep. Now Haman thinks he has the fairest opportunity he could wish for to solicit against Mordecai; but the king's heart is as full as his, and it is fit he should speak first.

3. The king asks Haman, how he should express his favour to one whom he had marked for a favourite. *What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?* ver. 6. Note, It is a good property in kings and other superiors, to delight in bestowing rewards, and not to delight in punishing. Parents and masters should take a pleasure in commending and encouraging that which is good in those under their charge.

4. Haman concludes he himself was the favourite intended, and therefore prescribes the highest instances of honour that could for once be bestowed upon a subject. His proud heart presently suggested to whom would the king delight to do honour more than to himself? None deserves it so well as I, thinks Haman, nor stands so fair for it. See how men's pride deceives them. (1.) Haman had a better opinion of his merits than there was cause for. He thought none so worthy of honour as himself: it is a foolish thing for us thus to think ourselves the only deserving persons, or more deserving than any other. The deceitfulness of our own hearts appears in nothing so much as in the good conceit we have of ourselves and our own performances, against which we should therefore constantly watch and pray. (2.) He had a better opinion of his interest than there was reason for. He thought the king loved and valued nobody but himself, but was deceived. Others' esteem of us we should suspect to be not so great as it seems to be, or as we are sometimes willing to believe it is, that we may not think too well of ourselves, nor place too much confidence in others.

Now Haman thinks he is carving out honours for himself, and therefore doth it very liberally, (ver. 8, 9.) Nay, he doth it presumptuously, prescribing honours too great to be conferred upon any subject. That he must be dressed in the royal robes, wear the royal crown, and ride the king's own horse; in short, he must appear in all the pomp and grandeur of the king himself, only he must not carry the scepter, the emblem of power. He must be attended by one of the king's most noble princes; that must be his lackey, and all the people must be made to take notice of him and do him reverence, for he must ride in state through the streets, and it must be proclaimed before him for his honour, and the encouragement of all to seek the ruler's favour, *Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour:* which had the same intention with that which was proclaimed before Joseph, *Bow the knee,* for every good subject will honour those whom the king delights to honour; and shall not every good Christian then honour those whom the King of kings delights to honour, and call the saints which are on the earth, the excellent ones?

5. The king confounds him with a positive order, that he should immediately go himself, and put all this honour upon Mordecai the Jew, ver. 10. If the king had but said, as Haman expected, *Thou art the man,* what a fair opportunity would he have had to do the errand he came on, and to have desired, that to grace the solemnity of his triumph, Mordecai, his sworn enemy, might be hanged at the same time? but how he is thunderstruck when the king bids him not order all this to be done, but to do it himself to Mordecai the Jew, the very man he hated above all men, and whose ruin he was now designing! Now it is to no purpose to think of moving any thing to

to the king against Mordecai, when he is *the man whom the king delights to honour*. Solomon saith, *the heart of the king is unsearchable*, Prov. xxv. 3. but it is not unchangeable.

6. Haman dares not dispute, nor so much as seem to dislike the king's order, but with the greatest regret and reluctance imaginable brings it to Mordecai, who I suppose did no more cringe to Haman now than he had done, valuing his counterfeit respects no more than he had valued his concealed malice. The apparel is brought, Mordecai is dressed up and rides in state through the city under the notion of the king's favourite, *ver. 11*. It is hard to say which of the two put a greater force upon himself; proud Haman in putting this honour upon Mordecai, or humble Mordecai in accepting it; the king will have it so, and both must submit. Upon this account it was agreeable to Mordecai, as it was an indication of the king's favour, and gave hope that Esther would prevail for the reversing of the edict against the Jews.

12. ¶ And Mordecai came again to the king's gate: but Haman halted to his house mourning and having his head covered. 13. And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends, every *thing* that had befallen him. Then said his wife men, and Zeresh his wife unto him, if Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him. 14. And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and halted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

We may here observe,

1. How little Mordecai was puffed up with his advancement. He came again to the king's gate, *ver. 12*. he returned to his place and the duty of it immediately, and minded his business as close as he had done before. Honour is well bestowed on those that are not made proud and idle by it, and will not think themselves above their business.

2. How much Haman was cast down with his disappointment. He could not bear it, to wait upon any man, especially Mordecai, and at this time, when he hoped to have seen him hanged was enough to break such a proud heart as he had. He halted to his house mourning and having his head covered, as one that looked upon himself sunk, and in a manner condemned. What harm had it done him to stoop thus to Mordecai? Was he ever the worse for it? Was it not what he himself proposed to be done by one of the king's most noble princes? Why then should he grudge to do it himself? But that will break a proud man's heart, which would not break a humble man's sleep.

3. How his doom was out of this event read him by his wife and his friends. If Mordecai be, as they say he is, *of the seed of the Jews*, before whom thou hast begun to fall, though but in a point of honour, never expect to prevail against him, for thou shalt surely fall before him, *ver. 13*. Miserable comforters are they all; they do not advise him to repent, and ask Mordecai's pardon for his ill design against him, but foretel his destiny as fatal and unavoidable. Two things they foresee, (1.) That Haman would be disappointed in his enterprise against the Jews, *thou shalt not prevail* to root out that people; Heaven plainly fights against thee. (2.) That he himself would be destroyed, *thou shalt surely fall before him*; the contest between Michael and the dragon will not be a drawn battle; no, Haman must fall before Mordecai. Two things they ground their prognostications upon. (1.) This Mordecai is *of the seed of the Jews*; feeble Jews, their enemies sometimes called them, but formidable Jews they sometimes found them. They are a holy seed, a praying seed, in covenant with God, and a seed that the Lord hath all along blessed; and therefore let not their enemies expect to triumph over them. (2.) That he had begun to fall, and therefore he is certainly a gone man. It has been observed of great court favourites that when once they have been frowned upon, they have fallen all before them, as fast as they rose; it is true of the church's enemies. When God begins with them, he will make an end. As for God, his work is perfect.

4. How seasonable he was now sent to the banquet that Esther had prepared, *ver. 14*. He thought it seasonable, he hopes it would revive his drooping spirits, and save his sinking honour. But really it was seasonable, because his spirits being broke down by this sore disappointment, he might the easier be run down by Esther's complaints against him. The wisdom of God is seen in tuning the means of his church's deliverance, so as to manifest his own glory.

C H A P. VII.

We are now to attend the second banquet to which the king and Haman were invited, and there, (1.) Esther presents her petition to the king for her life, and the life of her people, *ver. 1-4*. (2.) She plainly tells the king that Haman was the man who designed her ruin, and the ruin of all her friends, *ver. 5, 6*. (3.) The king thereupon gave orders for the hanging of Haman upon the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, which was done accordingly, *ver. 7-10*. and thus, by the destruction of the plotter, a good step was taken towards the defeating of the plot.

1. SO the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. 2. And the king said again unto Esther, on the second day, at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. 3. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given at my petition, and my people at my request. 4. For we are sold. I and my people to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish: but if we had been sold for bond-men and bond-women, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. 5. Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he? and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do

so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

The king in humour, and Haman out of humour, meet at Esther's table. Now here,

1. The king urged Esther a third time to tell him what her request was, for he longed to know, and repeats his promise, that it should be granted, *ver. 2*. If the king had now forgot that Esther had an errand to him, and had not again asked what it was, she could scarce have known how to renew it herself; but he was mindful of it, and now was bound with the threefold cord of a promise thrice made to favour her.

2. Esther at length surpriseth the king with a petition, not for wealth or honour, or the preferment of some of her friends to some high post, which the king expected, but for the preservation of herself and her countrymen from death and destruction, *ver. 3, 4*. Even a stranger, a criminal, shall be permitted to petition for his life. But that a friend, a wife, should have occasion to present such a petition was very affecting: *let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request*. Two things bespeak lives very precious, and fit to be saved, if innocent, at any expence. (1.) Majesty. If it be a crowned head that is struck at, it is time to stir. Esther's was so: *Let my life be given me*; if thou hast any affection for the wife of thy bosom, now is a time to shew it, for that is the life that lies at stake. (2.) Multitude. If they be many lives, very many, and those no way forfeited, that he aimed at, no time should be lost, nor pains spared to prevent mischief. It is not a friend or two, but my people, a whole nation, and a nation dear to me, for the saving of which I now intercede.

To move the king the more, she suggests, (1.) That she and her people were bought and sold. They had not sold themselves by any offence against the government, but were sold to gratify the pride and revenge of one man. (2.) That it was not their liberty only, but their lives that were sold. Had we been sold (saith she) into slavery, I would not have complained, for in time we might have recovered our liberty, though the king would have made but an ill bargain of it, and not have increased his wealth by our price. Whatever had been paid for us, the loss of so many industrious hands out of his kingdom would have been more damage to the treasury than the price would countervail. To persecute good people is as impolitic as it is impious, and a manifest wrong to the interests of princes and states; they are weakened and impoverished by it. But this was not the case. *We are sold* (saith she) *to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish*, and then it is time to speak. She refers to the words of the decree, *chap. iii. 13*, which aimed at nothing short of their destruction. This would touch in a tender part, if there were any such in the king's heart, and would bring him to relent.

3. The king stands amazed at the remonstrance, and asks, *ver. 5*. *Who is he, where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?* What, contrive the murder of the queen and all her friends? Is there such a man? such a monster rather in nature? *Who is he, and where is he, whose heart has filled him to do so?* Or, who hath filled his heart? He admires, 1. That any one should be so bad as to think such a thing; Satan certainly filled his heart. 2. That any one should be so bold as to do such a thing; should have his heart so fully set in him to do wickedly? should be so very daring? Note, 1. It is hard to imagine there should be such horrid wickedness committed in the world as really there is. Who, where is he, that dares presume to question the being of God and his providence, to banter his oracles, profane his name, persecute his people, and yet bid defiance to his wrath. Such there are, to think of whom is enough to make horror take hold of us, *Psal. cxix. 53*. 2. We sometimes startle at the mention of the evil, which yet we ourselves are chargeable with. Ahasuerus is amazed at that wickedness, which he himself was guilty of, for he consented to that bloody edict against the Jews. *Thou art the man*, might Esther too truly have said.

4. Esther plainly charges Haman with it before his face: here he is, let him speak for himself, for therefore he is invited. *The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman?* *ver. 6*. It is he that has designed our murder, and, which is worse, has basely drawn the king to be *participis criminis*, ignorantly agreeing to it.

5. Haman is soon apprehensive of his danger. He was afraid before the king and the queen; and it was time for him to fear, when the queen was his prosecutor, the king his judge, and his own conscience a witness against him; and the surprising operations of government against him that same morning could not but increase his fear. Now he has little joy of his being invited to the banquet of wine, but finds himself in straits when he thought himself in the fulness of his sufficiency. He is cast into a net by his own feet.

7. ¶ And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath, went into the palace-garden; and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen: for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. 8. Then the king returned out of the palace-garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9. And Harbonah one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. 10. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

Here, 1. The king retires in anger. He rose from table in a great passion, and went into the palace garden to cool himself, and to consider what was to be done, *ver. 7*. He lent not for his seven wife counsellors which knew times, being ashamed to consult with them about the undoing of that which he had rashly done without their knowledge or advice; but he went to walk in the garden a while, to compare in his thought what Esther had now informed him of, with what formerly passed between him and Haman, And we may suppose him, (1.) Vexed at himself that he should be such a fool

fool as to doom such a guiltless nation to destruction, and his own queen among the rest, upon the base suggestion of a self-seeking man, without examining the truth of his allegations. They that do things with a self-will, reflect upon them afterwards with a self-reproach. (2.) Vexed at Haman whom he had laid in his bosom, that he should be such a villain as to abuse his interest to him, to draw him to consent to so ill a thing. When he saw himself betrayed by one he had cherished, he was full of indignation at him, yet would say nothing, till he had taken time for second thoughts, to see whether they would make the matter better or worse than it first appeared, that he might proceed accordingly. When we are angry, we should pause a while, before we come to any resolution, as those that have a rule over our own spirits, and are governed by reason.

2. Haman becomes a humble petitioner to the queen for his life. He might easily perceive by the king's hasty flying out of the room, that there was evil determined against him. For the wrath of a king, such a king is as the roaring of a lion, and as messengers of death, and now see, (1.) How mean Haman looks when he stands up at first, and then falls down at Esther's feet, to beg she would save his life and take all he had. They that are most haughty, insolent, and imperious, when they are in power and prosperity, are commonly the most abject and poor spirited when the wheel turns upon them. Cowards, they say, are most cruel, and then consciousness of their cruelty makes them the more cowardly. (2.) How great Esther looks, who of late had been neglected and doomed to the slaughter, *tanquam ovem*, now her sworn enemy owns that he lies at her mercy, and begs his life at her hand. Thus did God regard the low estate of his hand-maiden, and scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts, Luke i. 48, 51. And compare with this that promise made to the Philadelphian church, Rev. iii. 9. *I will make them of the synagogue of Satan to come and worship before the feet, and to know that I have loved thee.* The day is coming when those that hate and persecute God's chosen ones, would gladly be beholden to them; Give us of your oil. Father Abraham, send Lazarus. The upright shall have dominion in the morning.

3. The king returns yet more exasperated against Haman. The more he thinks of him the worse he thinks of him, and of what he had done. It was but lately, that every thing Haman said and did, even that which was most criminal, was taken and well construed to his advantage; now, on the contrary, what Haman did, that was not only innocent but a sign of repentance, is ill taken, and without colour of reason construed to his disadvantage. He lay in terror at Esther's feet to beg for his life. What? saith the king, will he force the queen also before me in the house? Not that he thought he had any such intention, but having been musing on Haman's design to slay the queen, and finding him in this posture, he takes occasion from it thus to vent his passion against Haman, as a man that would not stick at the greatest and most impudent piece of wickedness. He designed to slay the queen, and to slay her with me in the house, will he in like manner force her? What ravish her first, and then murder her? He that had a design upon her life, may well be suspected to have a design upon her chastity.

4. Those about him were ready to be the instruments of his wrath. The courtiers that adored Haman when he was the rising sun, set themselves as much against him now he is a falling star, and are even glad of an occasion to run him down; so little sure can proud men be of the interest they think they have. (1.) As soon as the king spake an angry word they covered Haman's face as a condemned man, not worthy any more either to see the king, or to be seen by him; they marked him for execution; those that are hanged commonly have their faces covered. See how ready the servants were to take the first hint of the king's mind in this matter. *Turba Remi sequitur fortunam ut semper & odit dominatos.* If Haman be going down, they all cry, down with him. (2.) One of them that had been lately sent to Haman's house to fetch him to the banquet, informed the king, of the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordecai, ver. 9. Now Mordecai is the favourite, the chamberlain applauds him, he spoke good for the king; and Haman being in disgrace, every thing is taken notice of that might make against him, incense the king against him, and fill up the measure of his iniquity.

5. The king gives orders that he should be hanged upon his own gallows, which was done accordingly, and he was not so much as asked what he had to say, why this judgment should not be passed upon him and execution awarded. The sentence is short, hang him thereon, and the execution speedy, so they hanged Haman on the gallows, ver. 10. See here, 1. Pride brought down: He that expected every one to do him reverence is now made an ignominious spectacle to the world, and himself sacrificed to justice, who did dares that less than a whole nation should be sacrificed to his revenge. God resists the proud, and those whom he resists will find him irresistible. 2. Persecution punished. Haman was upon many accounts a wicked man; but his enmity to God's church was his most provoking crime; and for that the God to whom vengeance belongs here reckons with him, and though his plot was defeated, gives him according to the wickedness of his endeavours, Psal. xxviii. 4. 3. Mischief returned upon the person himself that contrived it: the wicked snared in the work of his own hands, Psal. vii. 15, 16.—ix. 15, 16. Haman justly hanged on the gallows which he had unjustly prepared for Mordecai. If he had not set up the gallows, perhaps the king would not have thought of ordering him to be hanged; but if he rear a gallows for the man whom the king delights to honour, the honour is very natural, that he should be ordered to try it himself, and see how it fits him, see how he likes it. The enemies of God's church have often been thus taken in their own craftiness. In the morning Haman was designing himself for the robes, and Mordecai for the gallows, but the tables are turned, Mordecai has the crown, Haman the cross. The Lord is known by such judgments which he executeth. See Prov. xi. 8—xxi. 18.

Lastly, the satisfaction which the king had in this execution; Then was the king's wrath pacified, and not till then. As well pleased was he in ordering Haman to be hanged, as in ordering Mordecai to be honoured. Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to take vengeance on. God faith of the wicked men, Ezek. v. 13. *I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted.*

C H A P. VIII.

We left the plotter hanging, and are now to see what becomes of his plot. (1.) His plot was to raise an estate for himself, and all his estate being confiscated for treason, is given to Esther and Mordecai, ver. 1, 2. (2.) His plot was to ruin the Jews; and as to that, (1.) Esther earnestly intercedes for the reversing of the edict against them, ver. 3—6. (2.) It is in effect done by another edict here published, empowering the Jews to stand up in their own defence against their enemies, ver. 7—14. (3.) This occasions great joy to the Jews, and all their friends, ver. 15—17.

1. ON that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy, unto Esther the queen: and Mordecai came before the king: for Esther had told what he was unto her. 2. And the king took off his ring which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

It was but lately that we had Esther and Mordecai in tears; in fears; but fasting and praying; now let us see how to them there arose light in darkness.

1. Here is Esther enriched. Haman was hanged as a traitor, therefore his estate was forfeited to the crown, and the king gave it all to Esther, in recompence for the fright that wicked man had put her into; and the vexation he had created her, ver. 1. His houses and lands, goods and chattels, and all the money he had heaped up while he was prime minister of state, which we may suppose was no little, is given to Esther; it is all her own, added to the allowance she already had. Thus is the wealth of the sinner laid up for the just. And the innocent divides the silver, Job xxvi. 17, 18. What Haman would have done mischief with, Esther will do good with, and estates are to be valued as they are to be used.

2. Mordecai advanced. His pompous procession this morning through the streets of the city was but a sudden flash or blaze of honour, but here we have the more durable and gainful preferments to which he was raised, which the other happily made way for.

1. He is now owned as the queen's cousin, which till now, though Esther had been four years queen, for aught appears, the king did not know. So humble, so modest a man was Mordecai, and so far from being ambitious of a place at court, that he concealed his relation to the queen, and her obligation to him as her guardian, and never made use of her interest for any advantage of his own. Who but Mordecai could have taken so little notice of so great an honour? But now he was brought before the king, introduced as we say, to kiss his hand, for now at length Esther had told what he was to her, not only near akin to her, but the best friend she had in the world, who took care of her when she was an orphan, and one whom she still respected as a father. Now the king finds himself for his wife's sake more obliged than he thought he had been, to delight in doing honour to Mordecai. How great were the merits of that man, to whom both king and queen did in effect owe their lives? Being brought before the king, to him no doubt he bowed, and did reverence, though he would not to Haman an Amalekite.

2. The king makes him lord privy seal in the room of Haman; all the trust he had reposed in him, and all the power he had given him, is here transferred to Mordecai, for the ring which he had taken from Haman, he gave to Mordecai, and makes this trusty humble man as much his favourite, his confident, and his agent, as ever that proud perfidious wretch was. A happy change he made of his bosom friends, and so no doubt, he and his people soon found it.

3. The queen makes him her steward for the management of Haman's estates, and for getting and keeping possession of it. She set Mordecai over the house of Haman: See the vanity of laying up treasure upon earth; he that heapeth up riches knoweth not who shall gather them, Psal. xxxix. 6. not only whether he shall be a wise man or a fool, Eccles. ii. 19: but whether he shall be a friend or an enemy. With what little pleasure, nay with what constant vexation would Haman have looked upon his estate, if he could have foreseen that Mordecai, the man he hated above all the men in the world should have rule over all that wherein he had laboured, and thought he shewed himself wise! It is our interest therefore to make sure of those riches which will not be left behind, but will go with us to another world.

3. ¶ And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears, to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. 4. Then the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther; So Esther arose and stood before the king. 5. And said, if it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes; let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: 6. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred! 7. ¶ Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen, and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. 8. Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. 9. Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month (that is the month Sivan) on the three and twentieth day thereof, and it was written (according to all that Mordecai commanded) unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India to Ethiopia, an hundred and twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language. 10. And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus's name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by post on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries: 11. Wherein the king granted the Jews, which were in every city, to gather themselves together, and to stand

stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province, that would assault them, *both* little ones, and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey: 12. Upon one day, in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, *namely*, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. 13. The copy of the writing, for a commandment to be given in every province, was published unto all the people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. 14. So the posts that rode upon mules, and camels went out, being hastened, and pressed on by the king's commandment; and the decree was given at Shushan the palace.

Haman the chief enemy of the Jews was hanged, Mordecai and Esther their chief friends were sufficiently protected; but many others there were in the king's dominions that hated the Jews and desired their ruin, and to their rage and malice all the rest of that people lay exposed; for the edict against them was still in force, in pursuance of which their enemies would at the day appointed fall upon them, and they would be deemed as rebels against the king and his government, if they should offer to resist, and take up arms in their own defence. For the preventing of this,

1. The queen here makes intercession with much affection and importunity. She came a second time uncalled into the king's presence, *ver. 3.* and was, as before, encouraged to present her petition, by the king's holding out the golden scepter to her, *ver. 4.* And her petition is, the king having put away Haman, would put away the mischief of Haman, and his device against the Jews, that that might not take place now he was taken off. Many a man's mischief survives him, and the wickedness he devised is in the going when he is gone. What men project and write may after their death be either very profitable or very pernicious; it was therefore requisite in this case, that for the defeating of Haman's plot they should apply themselves to the king for a further act of grace; that, by another edict, he would reverse the letters devised by Haman, and which he wrote, (the doth not say which the king consented to, and confirmed with his own seal, she leaves it to his own conscience to say that) by which he took an effectual course to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces, *ver. 5.* If the king were indeed, as he seemed to be, troubled that such a decree was made, he could not do less than revoke it. For what is repentance, but undoing to the utmost of our power what we have done amiss.

(1.) This petition Esther presents with much affection. She fell down at the king's feet; and besought him with tears, *ver. 3.* Every tear as precious as any of the pearls with which she was adorned. It was time to be earnest when the church of God lay at stake. Let none be so great as to be unwilling to stoop, none so merry as to be unwilling to weep, when thereby they may do any service to God's church and people. Esther, though safe herself, fell down, and begged with tears for the deliverance of her people.

(2.) She expresseth it with great submission, and a mighty deference to the king and his wisdom and will, *ver. 5.* *If it please the king and if I have found favour in his sight*; and again, *if the thing itself seem right and reasonable before the king, and if I that ask it, be pleasing in his eyes*, let the decree be reversed: even then when we have ever so much reason and justice on our side, and have ever so clear a cause to plead, yet it becomes us to speak to our betters with humility and modesty, and all possible expressions of respect, and not talk like demandants, when we are supplicants. There is nothing lost by decency and good breeding, *As soft answers turn away wrath*, so soft askings obtain favour.

(3.) She enforceth her petition with a pathetic plea, *for how can I endure to see evil that shall come upon my people?* Little comfort can I have of my own life, if I cannot prevail for theirs: as good share in the evil myself as see it come upon them; *for how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred*, that are dear to me? Esther a queen owns her poor kindred, and speaks of them with a very tender concern. Now it was, that she mingled her tears with her words, that she wept and made supplication; we read of no tears when she begged for her own life, but now she was sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like. They that are truly concerned for the public would rather die in the last ditch, than live to see the desolations of the church of God, and the ruin of their country. Tender spirits cannot bear to think of the destruction of their people and kindred, and therefore dare not omit any opportunity of giving them relief.

2. The king here takes a course for the preventing of the mischief that Haman had designed.

1. The king knew and informed the queen, that according to the constitution of the Persian government, the former edict could not be revoked, *ver. 8.* What is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may not under any pretence whatsoever be reversed. This was a fundamental article of their *magna charta*, that no law or decree, when once it had passed the royal assent, could be repealed or recalled, no judgment vacated, no attainder reversed, *Dan. vi. 15.* which is so far from speaking the wisdom and honour of the Medes and Persians, that really it speaks their pride and folly, and consequently their shame. It is ridiculous in itself for any man, or company of men, to pretend such an infallibility of wisdom, as to foresee all the consequences of what they decree; and therefore it is unjust and injurious to mankind to claim such a supremacy of power, as to make their decrees irrevocable, whether the consequences prove good or bad. This favours of that old presumption which ruined us all, we will be as gods. Much more prudent is that proviso of our constitution, that no law can by any words or sanctions whatsoever be made unrepealable, no more than any estate unalienable. *Cujus est instituere ejus est destruere.* It is God's prerogative not to repent, and to say what can never be altered or unsaid.

2. Yet he found an expedient to undo the devices of Haman and defeat his design, by signing and publishing another decree, to authorize the Jews to stand upon their defence, *vim vi repellere, & invictum occidere.* And this would be their effectual security. The king shews them that he had enough already to convince them that he had a concern for the Jewish nation, for he had ordered his scribe to write to be hanged, *because he laid his hand upon the Jews*, *ver. 7.* And therefore he would do the utmost he could to protect them; and leave it as fully with Esther and Mordecai to use his name and power for their deliverance, as before he had lent it with Haman to use his name and power for their destruction, *write for the Jews as it liketh you*, *ver. 8.* saving only the honour of our constitution. Let the mischief be put away as effectually as may be without reversing the letters.

The secretaries of state were ordered to attend, to draw up this edict on the twenty-third day of the third month, *ver. 9.* about two months after the promulgation of the former, but nine months before the time set for its execution: it was to be drawn up and published in their respective languages

of all the provinces: shall the subject of an earthly prince have his decrees in a language they understand, and shall God's oracles and laws be locked up from his servants in an unknown tongue! It was to be directed to the proper officers of every province, both to the justices of peace and to the deputy-lieutenants. It was to be carefully dispersed throughout all the king's dominions, and true copies sent by express to all the provinces.

The purport of this decree was to commit to the Jews upon the day which was appointed for their destruction, to draw together in a body for their own defence. And, (1.) To stand for their life, that whoever assaulted them, it might be at their peril. (2.) They might not only act defensively, but might destroy and slay, and cause to perish all the power of the people that would assault them, men, women, and children, *ver. 11.* and thus to avenge themselves on their enemies, *ver. 13.* and if they pleased to enrich themselves by their enemies, for they were empowered to take the spoil of them for a prey. Now, 1. This shewed his kindness to the Jews, and sufficiently provided for their safety, for the latter decree would be looked upon as an implicit revocation of the former, though not express. But, 2. It shews the absurdity of that branch of their constitution, that none of the king's edicts might be repealed, for it laid the king here under a necessity of enacting a civil war in his own dominions, between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms by his authority, and yet against his authority. No better could come of men's pretending to be wiser above what is given them. Great expedition was used in dispersing this decree, the king himself being in pain, lest it should come too late, and any mischief should be done to the Jews by virtue of the former decree, before the notice of this arrived: It was therefore by the king's commandment, as well as Mordecai's, that the messengers were hastened and pressed on, *ver. 14.* and had swift beasts provided them, *ver. 10.* It was not a time to trifle, when so many lives were in danger.

15. ¶ And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen, and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad: 16. The Jews had light and gladness, and joy, and honour. 17. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day: and many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

It was but a few days ago that we had Mordecai in sackcloth, and all the Jews in sorrow; but here is a blessed change, Mordecai in purple and all the Jews in joy. See *Psal. xxx. 5—11, 12.*

1. Mordecai in purple, *ver. 15.* Having obtained an order for the relief of all the Jews, he was easy, parting with his mourning weeds, and put on the royal apparel which either belonged to this place, or which the king appointed him as a favourite. His robes were rich, blue and white, of linen and purple; so was his coronet, it was of gold. These are things not worth taking notice of, but as they were marks of the king's favour, and that the fruit of God's favour to the church. It is well with a land, when the ensigns of dignity are made the ornament of serious piety; the city Shushan was sensible of its advantage by the preferment of Mordecai, and therefore rejoiced and was glad, not only pleased in general with the advancement of virtue, but promising themselves in particular better times, now so good a man was intrusted with power. Haman was hanged, and when the wicked perish there is shouting, *Prov. xi. 10.* Mordecai was preferred, and when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.

2. The Jews in joy, *ver. 16, 17.* The Jews, that a while ago were under a dark cloud, dejected and disgraced, now had light and gladness, joy and honour, a feast and a good day; if they had not been threatened and in distress, they had not had occasion for this extraordinary joy. Therefore God's people are made to sow in tears, sometimes that they may reap in so much the more joy. The suddenness and strangeness of the turn of affairs in their favour, added much to their joy; they were like them that dream; then was their mouth filled with laughter, *Psal. cxxvi. 1, 2.*

One good effect of this deliverance was, that many of the people of the land, that were moderate, sober, and well inclined, became Jews, were proselyted to the Jewish religion, renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God only. Haman thought to extirpate the Jews, but it proves in the issue, that their numbers are greatly increased and many added to the church. Observe, When the Jews had joy and gladness, then many of the people of the land became Jews; the holy cheerfulness of those that profess religion, is a great ornament to their profession, and will invite and encourage others to be religious. The reason here given why so many became Jews at this time, is because the fear of the Jews fell upon them. When they observed how wonderfully the divine providence had owned them, and wrought for them in this critical juncture, (1.) They thought them great, and those happy that were among them, and therefore they came over to them, as was foretold, *Zech. vii. 23.* *We will go with you for we have heard, we have seen, that God is with you, the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency*, *Deut. xxxiii. 29.* When the church prospers, and is smiled upon, many will come into it, that will be shy of it when it is in trouble. (2.) They thought them formidable, and those miserable that were against them. They plainly saw in Haman's fate, that if they offered injury to the Jews it was at their peril, and therefore for their own security they joined themselves to them. It is folly to think of meddling with the God of Israel, and therefore it is wisdom to think of submitting to him.

C H A P. IX.

We left two royal edicts in force, both given at the court of Shushan, one bearing date the thirteenth day of the first month, appointing, that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month then next ensuing, all the Jews should be killed; and another bearing date the twenty-third day of the third month, empowering the Jews on the day appointed for their slaughter, to draw the sword in their own defence, and make their part good against their enemies as well as they could. Great expectation there was no doubt of this day, and the issue of it. The Jews' cause was to be tried by battle, and the day fixed for the combat by authority. Their enemies resolved not to lose the advantages given them by the first edict, in hope to overpower them by numbers; the Jews relied on the goodness of their God, and justice of their cause, and resolved to make their efforts against their enemies. The day comes at length, and here we are told (1.) What a glorious day it was that year to the Jews, and the two

days following; a day of victory and triumph, both in the city Shushan, and in all the rest of the king's provinces, ver. 1—19. (2.) What a memorable day it was made to posterity, by an annual feast, in commemoration of the great deliverance, called the feast of Purim, ver. 20—32.

NOW in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar) on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary,) that the Jews had rule over them that hated them: 2. The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them: for the fear of them fell upon all the people. 3. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews: because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. 4. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. 5. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. 6. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. 7. And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, 8. And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, 9. And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, 10. The ten sons of Haman, the son of Hamedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand. 11. On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace, was brought before the king. 12. ¶ And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition; and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. 13. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan, to do to-morrow also according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons to be hanged upon the gallows. 14. And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons. 15. For the Jews that were in Shushan, gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand. 16. But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces, gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand: but they laid not their hands on the prey. 17. On the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day of the same, rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 18. But the Jews that were at Shushan, assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof: and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 19. Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled towns made the fourteenth day of the month Adar, a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

We have here a decisive battle fought between the Jews and their enemies, in which the Jews were victorious. Neither side were surprized, for both had notice long enough before, so that it was a fair trial of skill between them. Nor could either side call the other rebels, for they were both supported by the royal authority.

1. The enemies of the Jews were the aggressors. They hoped notwithstanding the latter edict, to have power over them, by virtue of the former, ver. 1. and made assaults upon them accordingly: formed themselves into bodies, and joined in confederacy against them, to seek their hurt, ver. 2. The Chaldee paraphrase saith, none appeared against the Jews but Amalekites only, who were infatuated, and had their hearts hardened, as Pharaoh's against Israel, to take up arms for their own destruction. Some had such an inveterate implacable malice against the Jews, that Haman's fall and Mordecai's advancement, instead of convincing them, did but exasperate them, and make them more outrageous and resolute to cut all their throats. The sons of Haman, particularly, vowed to avenge their father's death, and pursue his designs, which they call noble and brave, whatever hazards they run; and a strong party they had formed both in Shushan and in the provinces, in order hereunto. Fight they would, though they plainly saw providence fight against them, and thus they were infatuated to their own destruction. If they would have sitted still, and attempted nothing against the people of God, nor a hair of the head had fallen to the ground; but they cannot persuade themselves to do that, they must be meddling, though it prove to their own ruin; and roll a burdensome stone, which will return upon them.

2. But the Jews were the conquerors. That very day, when the king's decree for their destruction was to be put in execution, and which the ene-

mies thought would have been their day, proved God's day, (Psalm xxxvii. 13.) it was turned to the contrary of what was expected, and the Jews had rule over them that hated them, ver. 1. We are here told,

1. What the Jews did for themselves, ver. 2. they gathered themselves together in their cities, embodied, and stood upon their defence, offering violence to none, but bidding defiance to all. If they had not had an edict to warrant them, they durst not have done it, but being so supported, they strove lawfully. Had they acted separately, each family apart, they had been an easy prey to their enemies, but acting in concert, and gathering together in their cities, they strengthened one another, and durst face their enemies. *Vis unitor fortior.* Those that write of the state of the Jews at this day, gave this as the reason why, though they are very numerous in many parts and rich, yet they are so despicable, because they are generally so selfish that they cannot incorporate, and being under the curse of dispersion cannot unite, nor (as here) gather together, for if they could, they might with their numbers and wealth threaten the most potent states.

2. What the rulers of the provinces did for them, under the influence of Mordecai. All the officers of the king, who by the bloody edict were ordered to help forward their destruction, chap. iii. 12, 13. conformed themselves to the latter edict (which being an estoppel against an estoppel, had set the matter at large and left them at liberty to observe which they pleased) and helped the Jews, which turned the scale on their side, ver. 3. The provinces would generally do as the ruler of the provinces inclined, and therefore their favouring the Jews would greatly further them. But why did they help them? not because they had any kindness for them, but because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them, he having manifestly the countenance both of God and the king. They all saw it their interest to help Mordecai's friends, because he was not only great in the king's house, and caressed by the courtiers, as many are, who have no intrinsic worth to support their reputation, but his fame for wisdom and virtue went out from thence throughout all the provinces, in all places he was cried up as a great man; he was looked upon also as a thriving man, and one that waxed greater and greater, ver. 4. And therefore, for fear of him, all the king's officers helped the Jews. Great men may by their influence do a great deal of good, many that fear not God will stand in awe of them.

3. What God did for them; he struck all people with a fear of them, ver. 2. as the Canaanites were made afraid of Israel, *Josh. ii. 9.*—v. 1. so that though they had so much hardness as to assault them, yet they had not courage to prosecute the assault. Their hearts failed them when they came to engage, and none of the men of might could find their hands.

4. What execution they did hereupon, no man could withstand them, ver. 2. But they did what they would to those that hated them, ver. 3. So strangely were the Jews strengthened and spirited, and their enemies weakened and dispirited, that none of those who had marked themselves for their destruction escaped, but they smote them with the stroke of the sword. Particularly,

(1.) On the thirteenth day of the month Adar they slew in the city Shushan five hundred men, ver. 6. and the ten sons of Haman, ver. 10. The Jews, when on the feast of Purim, they read this book of Esther, oblige themselves to read the names of Haman's ten sons all in one breath, without any pause, because they say they were all killed together, and all gave up the ghost just in the same moment. *Bux. Synag. Jud. c. 24.* And the Chaldee paraphrase saith, that when these ten were slain, Zeresh, with seventy more of his children, escaped, and afterwards begged their bread from door to door.

(2.) On the fourteenth day they slew in Shushan three hundred more, who had escaped the sword on the former day of execution, ver. 15. This Esther obtained leave of the king for them to do, for the greater terror of their enemies, and the utter crushing of that malignant party of men. The king had taken account of the numbers that were put to the sword the first day, ver. 11. and told Esther, ver. 12. and asked her what more she desired: Nothing, saith she, but commission to do another day's work: Esther surely was none of the blood-thirsty, none of those that delight in slaughter, but she had some very good reasons that moved her to make this request. She also desired that the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons might be hanged up on the gallows in which their father was hanged, for the greater disgrace of the family and terror of the party, ver. 12. and it was done accordingly, ver. 14. and it is supposed they were hanged in chains, and left hanging for some time.

(3.) The Jews in the country kept to their orders, and slew no more of their enemies than what were slain the thirteenth day, which were in all among all the provinces seventy-five thousand, ver. 16. If all these were Amalekites (as the Jews say) surely now it was, that the remembrance of Amalek was utterly put out, *Exod. xvii. 14.* However, that which justifies them in the execution of so many is, that they did it in their own just and necessary defence, they stood for their lives; authorized to do so by the law of self-preservation, as well as by the king's decree.

(4.) In these several executions, it is taken notice of, that on the prey they laid not their hand, ver. 10, 15, 16. The king's commission had warranted them to take the spoil of their enemies for a prey, chap. viii. 11. and a fair opportunity they had of enriching themselves with it; if Haman's party had prevailed, no doubt they would have made use of their authority to seize the goods and estates of the Jews, chap. iii. 13. But the Jews would not do so by them, (1.) That they might, to the honour of their religion, evidence a holy and generous contempt of worldly wealth, in imitation of their father Abraham, who scorned to enrich himself with the spoils of Sodom. (2.) That they might make it to appear, they aimed at nothing but their own preservation, and used their interest at court for the saving of their lives, not for the raising of their estates. (3.) Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, even the little ones and the women, chap. viii. 11. But their humanity forbade them to do that, though that was designed against them; they slew none, but those they found in arms; and therefore they did not take the spoil, but left it to the women and little ones whom they spared for their subsistence, otherwise as good slay them as starve them, take away their lives, as to take away their livelihoods. Herein they acted with a consideration and compassion well worthy imitation.

5. What a satisfaction they had in their deliverance: the Jews in the country cleared themselves of their enemies on the thirteenth day of the month, and they rested on the fourteenth day, ver. 17. and made that a thanksgiving-day, ver. 19. The Jews in Shushan, the royal city, took two days for their military execution, so that they rested on the fifteenth day, and made that their thanksgiving-day, ver. 18. Both of them celebrated their festival the very day after they had finished their work, and gained their point. When we have received signal mercies from God, we ought to be quick and speedy in making our thankful returns to him, while the mercy is fresh and the impressions of it most sensible.

20. And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of

of the king Ahasuerus, *both nigh and far*. 21. To establish *this* among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same yearly: 22. As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. 23. And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them. 24. Because Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot) to consume them, and to destroy them: 25. But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters, that his wicked device which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. 26. Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur: therefore for all the words of this letter, and of *that* which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, 27. The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year: 28. And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city: and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. 29. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. 30. And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus with words of peace and truth: 31. To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew, and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. 32. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.

We may well imagine how much affected Mordecai and Esther were with the triumphs of the Jews over their enemies, and how they saw the issue of that decisive day, with a satisfaction proportionable to the care and concern with which they expected it. How were their hearts enlarged with joy in God and his salvation, and what new songs of praise were put into their mouths! But here we are told what course they took to spread the knowledge of it among their people, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it to posterity, for the honour of God, and the encouragement of his people to trust in him at all times.

1. The history was written, and copies of it dispersed among all the Jews in all provinces of the empire, *both nigh and far*, ver. 20. They all knew something of the story, being nearly concerned in it, were by the first edict made sensible of their danger, and by the second of their deliverance, but how this amazing turn was given, they could not tell, Mordecai therefore wrote *these things*. And if this book be the same that he wrote, as many think it is, I cannot but observe what a difference there is between Mordecai's style and Nehemiah's; Nehemiah at every turn takes notice of the divine providence and the good hand of his God upon him, which is very proper to stir up devout affections in the minds of his readers; but Mordecai never so much as mentions the name of God in the whole story. Nehemiah wrote his book at Jerusalem, where religion was in fashion, and an air of it appeared on men's common conversation; Mordecai wrote his at Shushan the palace, where policy reigned more than piety, and he wrote according to the genius of the place. Even those that have the root of the matter in them, are apt to lose the favour of religion, and let their leaf wither when they converse wholly with those that have little religion. Commend me to Nehemiah's way of writing, that I would imitate, and yet learn from Mordecai's, that men may be truly devout, though they do not abound in the shews and expressions of devotion: and therefore we must not judge or despise our brethren. But because there is so little of the language of Canaan in this book, many think it was not written by Mordecai, but was an extract out of the journals of the kings of Persia, giving an account of the matter of fact, which the Jews themselves knew how to comment upon.

2. A festival was instituted, to be observed yearly from generation to generation by the Jews in remembrance of this wonderful work which God wrought for them; that *the children which should be born* might know it, and declare it to their children, that they might set their hope in God, Psal. lxxviii. 6, 7. It would be for the honour of God as the protector of his people, and the honour of Israel as the care of heaven, a confirmation of the fidelity of God's covenant, an invitation to strangers to come into the bonds of it, and an encouragement to God's own people cheerfully to depend upon him, and his wisdom, power and goodness, in the greatest straits. Posterity would reap the benefit of this deliverance, and therefore ought to celebrate the memorial of it.

Now concerning this festival we are told,

1. When it was observed. Every year on the fourteenth and fifteenth day of the twelfth month, just a month before the passover, ver. 21. Thus the first month and the last month of the year, kept in remembrance the months that were past, even the days when God preserved them. They kept two days together as thanksgivings-days, and did not think that too much to spend in praising God. Let us not be niggardly in our returns of praise to him, who bestows his favours so liberally upon us. Observe, They did not keep the days when they fought, but the days when they rested; on the fourteenth day the country Jews rested, and on the fifteenth those in Shushan, and both those

they kept. The sabbath was appointed not on the day that God finished his work, but the day he rested from it. The modern Jews observe the thirteenth day, the day appointed for their destruction, as a fasting-day, grounding on it, ver. 31. the matters of their fastings and cry. But that refers to what was in the day of their distress, chap. iv. 3—16. which was not to be continued, when God had turned their terrors into joy and gladness, Zech. viii. 19.

2. How it was called. The feast of Purim, ver. 26. from Pur, a Persian word, which signifies a lot, because Haman had by lot determined this to be the time of the Jews' destruction, but the Lord, at whose disposal the lot is, had determined it to be the time of their triumph. The name of this festival would mind them of the sovereign dominion of the God of Israel, who served his own purposes by the foolish superstitions of the heathen, and outwitted the monthly prognosticators in their own craft, Isa. xlvii. 13. frustrating the tokens of the liars, and making the diviners mad. Isa. xlv. 25, 26.

3. By whom it was instituted and enacted. It was not a divine institution, and therefore is not called a holy day, but a human appointment by which it was made a good day, ver. 19—22. (1.) The Jews ordained it, and took it upon themselves, ver. 27. voluntarily undertook to do as they began, ver. 23. They obliged themselves to do it by common consent. (2.) Mordecai and Esther confirmed their resolve, that it might be the more binding to posterity, and might come well recommended by those great names. They wrote, (1.) With all authority, ver. 29. as well they might, Esther being queen, and Mordecai prime minister of state. It is well when those who are in authority use it to authorize that which is good. (2.) With words of peace and truth; though they wrote with authority, they wrote with tenderness; not imperious, not imposing, but in such language as the council at Jerusalem use in their decree, Acts xv. 29. if ye do so and so, ye shall do well, fave ye well. Such was the style of these letters, or such the salutation or valediction of them, peace and truth be with you.

4. By whom it was to be observed; by all the Jews, and by their seed, and by all such as joined themselves to them, ver. 21. The observation of this feast was to be both universal and perpetual; the proselytes must observe it in token of their sincere affection to the Jewish nation, and their having twined interest with them. A concurrence in joys and praises is one branch of the communion of saints.

5. Why it was to be observed. That the memorial of the great things God had done for his church might never perish from their seed, ver. 28. God doth not work wonders for a day, but to be had in everlasting remembrance. What he doth shall be for ever, and therefore should for ever be had in mind, Eccl. iii. 14. In this affair they would remember, (1.) Haman's ill practices against the church, to his perpetual reproach, ver. 24. Because he had devised against the Jews, to destroy them. Let this be kept in mind that God's people may never be secure, while they have such malicious enemies, on whom they ought to have a jealous eye; their enemies aim at no less than their destruction, on God therefore let them depend for salvation. (2.) Esther's good services to the church, to her immortal honour. When Esther, in peril of her life, came before the king, he repealed the edict, ver. 25. This also must be remembered, that wherever this feast should be kept, and this history read in explication of it, this which she did might be told for a memorial of her. Good deeds done for the Israel of God, ought to be remembered for the encouragement of others to do the like. God will not forget them, and therefore we must not. (3.) Their own prayers, and the answers given to them, ver. 31. the matters of their fastings and their cry. The more cries we have offered up in our trouble and the more prayers for deliverance, the more we are obliged to be thankful to God for deliverance. Call upon me in the time of trouble, and then offer to God thanksgiving.

6. How it was observed. And of this let us see,

1. What was here enjoined that was very good; that they should make it, (1.) A day of cheerfulness. A day of feasting and joy, ver. 22. And a feast was made for laughter, Eccl. x. 19. When God gives us cause to rejoice, why should we not express our joy? (2.) A day of generosity; sending portions one to another, in token of their pleasantness and mutual respect, and their being knit by this and other public common dangers and deliverances so much the closer to each other in love. Friends have their goods in common. (3.) A day of charity. Sending gifts to the poor. It is not to our kinsmen and rich neighbours only, that we are to send tokens, but to the poor and the miserable, Luke xiv. 12, 13. They that have received mercy, must, in token of their gratitude, shew mercy, and there never wants occasion, for the poor we have always with us. Thanksgiving and almsgiving should go together, that when we are rejoicing and blessing God, the heart of the poor may rejoice with us, and their loins may be strengthened.

2. What was added to this which was much better. They always at the feast read the whole story over in the synagogue each day, and put up three prayers to God, in the first of which they praise God for counting them worthy to attend this divine service. In the second, they thank him for the miraculous preservation of their ancestors; in the third, that they have lived to observe another festival in memory of it. So bishop Patrick.

3. What it is since degenerated to, which is much worse. Their own writers own, that this feast is commonly celebrated among them with gluttony and drunkenness, and excess of riot. Their Psalmist saith expressly, that in the feast of Purim a man should drink till he knows not the difference between cursed be Haman, and blessed be Mordecai. See what the corrupt and wicked nature of man often brings that to, which was at first well intended: here is a religious feast turned into a carnival, a perfect revel: as wakes among us. Nothing more purifies the heart, and adorns religion, than holy joy: nothing more pollutes the heart, and reproacheth religion, than carnal mirth and sensual pleasure. *Corruptio optimi est pessima.*

C H A P. X.

This is but a piece of a chapter. The rest of it beginning at ver. 4. with six chapters more, being found only in the Greek, are rejected as apocryphal. In these three verses, we have only some short hints. (1.) Concerning Ahasuerus in the throne, what a mighty prince he was, ver. 1, 2. (2.) Concerning Mordecai his favourite, what a mighty blessing he was to his people, ver. 2, 3.

1. AND the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. 2. And all the acts of his power, and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? 3. For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude

multitude of his brethen, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his feed.

We are here told,

1. How great and powerful king Ahafuerus was.

He had a vast dominion, both in the continent and among the islands, from which he raised a vast revenue. Besides the usual customs which the king of Persia exacted, *Ezra iv. 13.* he laid an additional tribute upon his subjects, to serve for some great occasion he had for money, *ver. 1. The king laid a tribute.* Happy is our island, that pays no tribute but what is laid upon it by its representatives, and those of its own choosing, and is not squeezed or oppressed by an arbitrary power, as some of its neighbour nation are. Besides this instance of the grandeur of Ahafuerus, many more might be given, that were *acts of his power and of his might*, but they are not thought fit to be recorded here in the sacred story, which is confined to the Jews, and relates the affairs of other nations only as they fell in with their affairs, but they are *written in the Persian chronicles*, *ver. 2.* which are long since lost and buried in oblivion, while the sacred writings live, live to honour, and will till time shall be no more. When the *kingdom of men*, monarchs and their monarchies, are destroyed, and *their memorial is perished with them*, (*Psal. ix. 6.*) the kingdom of God among men, and the records of that kingdom shall remain, and be *as the days of heaven*, *Dan. ii. 44.*

2. How great and good Mordecai was.

1. He was great, and it doth one good to see virtue and piety thus in honour. (2.) He was great with the king; next to him, as one he most delighted and confided in. Long had Mordecai sitten contentedly in the king's gate, and now at length he is advanced to the head-end of his council-board. Men of merit may for a time seem buried alive, but often by some means or other they are discovered and preferred at last. The declaration of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai, was *written in the chronicles of his kingdom*, as very memorable, and contributing to the great achievements of the king. He never did such acts of power, as he did when Mordecai was his right-hand. (2.) He was *great among the Jews*,

ver. 3. not only great above them, more honourable than any of them, but great with them, dear to them, familiar with them, and much respected by them. So far were they from envying his preferment, that they rejoiced in it, and added to it, by giving him a commanding interest among them, and submitting all their affairs to his direction.

2. He was good, very good, for he did good; that made him truly great, and then his greatness gave him an opportunity of doing so much the more good. When the king advanced him, (1.) He did not disown the people the Jews, nor was he ashamed of his relation to them, though they were strangers and captives, dispersed and despised. Still he wrote himself Mordecai the Jew, and therefore no doubt adhered to the Jews' religion, by the observances of which he distinguished himself, and yet it was no baulk to his preferment, nor looked upon as a blemish to him. (2.) He did not seek his own wealth, and the raising of an estate for himself and his family, which is the chief thing most aim at, when they get into great places at court, but he consulted the welfare of his people, and made it his business to advance that. His power, his wealth, and all his interest in the king and queen, he improved for the public good. (3.) He did not only do good, but he did it in a humble condescending way; was easy of access, courteous and affable in his carriage, and spoke peace to all that made their application to him. Doing good works is the best and chief thing expected from those that have wealth and power, but giving good words is also commendable, and makes the good deed the more acceptable. (4.) He did not side with any one party of his people against another, nor make some his favourites, while the rest were neglected and crushed, but whatever differences there were among them, he was a common father to them all, recommended himself to *the multitude of his brethen*, not despising the crowd, and spoke peace to *all their feed*, without distinction. Thus making himself acceptable by humility and beneficence, he was universally accepted, and gained the good word of all his brethen. Thanks be to God, such a government as this we are blessed with, which *seeks the welfare of our people, speaking peace to all their feed*. God continue it long, very long! And grant us, under the happy protection and influence of it, to *live quiet and peaceable lives, in godliness, honesty, and charity.*

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.